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An Introduction to Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion

*The Issue of Religious Content in the
Enlightenment and Romanticism*

Jon Stewart

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Abbreviations of Primary Texts

<i>Aesthetics</i>	<i>Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art</i> , vols 1–2, trans. by T. M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975, 1998.
<i>Dokumente</i>	<i>Dokumente zu Hegels Entwicklung</i> , ed. by Johannes Hoffmeister, Stuttgart: Frommann 1936.
<i>EL</i>	<i>The Encyclopaedia Logic. Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences</i> , trans. by T. F. Gerats, W. A. Suchting, H. S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett 1991.
<i>ETW</i>	<i>Early Theological Writings</i> , trans. by T. M. Knox, Fragments trans. by Richard Kroner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1948; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1975.
<i>Hamann</i>	<i>Hegel on Hamann</i> , trans. by Lisa Marie Anderson, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2008.
<i>Hegel's Library</i>	<i>Verzeichniß der von dem Professor Herrn Dr. Hegel und dem Dr. Herrn Seebeck, hinterlassenen Bücher-Sammlungen</i> , Berlin: C. F. Müller 1832. (Referenced by entry number and not page number.) (This work is reprinted in 'Hegels Bibliothek. Der Versteigerungskatalog von 1832', ed. by Helmut Schneider in <i>Jahrbuch für Hegelforschung</i> , vols 12–14, 2010, pp. 70–145.)
<i>Hist. of Phil.</i>	<i>Lectures on the History of Philosophy</i> , vols 1–3, trans. by E. S. Haldane, London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner 1892–96; Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 1995.
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe</i> , vols 1–20, ed. by Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1928–41.
<i>LHP</i>	<i>Lectures on the History of Philosophy: The Lectures of 1825–1826</i> , vols 1–3, ed. by Robert F. Brown, trans. by Robert F. Brown and J. M. Stewart, with the assistance of H. S. Harris, Berkeley: University of California Press and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990–2009.
<i>LPE</i>	<i>Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God</i> , ed. and trans. by Peter C. Hodgson, Oxford: Clarendon Press 2007.
<i>LPR</i>	<i>Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion</i> , vols 1–3, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, trans. by Robert F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson and J. M. Stewart with the assistance of H. S. Harris, Berkeley: University of California Press 1984–87.
<i>LPWH</i>	<i>Lectures on the Philosophy of World History</i> , vols 1–3, ed. and trans. by Robert F. Brown and Peter C. Hodgson, with the assistance of William G. Geuss, Oxford: Clarendon Press 2011–.
<i>LPWHI</i>	<i>Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, Introduction</i> , trans. by H. B. Nisbet, with an introduction by Duncan Forbes, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975.

MW	<i>Miscellaneous Writings of G. W. F. Hegel</i> , ed. by Jon Stewart, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2002.
NR	<i>Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion</i> , Zweiter Teil, <i>Die Bestimmte Religion</i> , Erstes Kapitel, <i>Die Naturreligion</i> , ed. by Georg Lasson, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1974 [1927] (second half of vol. 1 of <i>Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion</i> , vols 1–2, ed. by Georg Lasson, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1974), vol. 13.1 in <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> , ed. by Georg Lasson, Leipzig: Felix Meiner 1920–.
OW	<i>Die orientalische Welt</i> , ed. by Georg Lasson, Leipzig: Felix Meiner 1923 (vol. 2 of <i>Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte</i> , vols 1–4, ed. by Georg Lasson, Leipzig: Felix Meiner 1920–23).
<i>Phil. of Hist</i>	<i>The Philosophy of History</i> , trans. by J. Sibree, New York: Willey Book Co. 1944.
<i>Phil. of Mind</i>	<i>Hegel's Philosophy of Mind</i> , trans. by William Wallace and A. V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1971.
<i>Phil. of Nature</i>	<i>Hegel's Philosophy of Nature</i> , trans. by A. V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1970.
PhS	<i>Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit</i> , trans. by A. V. Miller, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1977.
PR	<i>Elements of the Philosophy of Right</i> , trans. by H. B. Nisbet, ed. by Allen Wood, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1991.
TE	<i>Three Essays, 1793–1795</i> , ed. and trans. by Peter Fuss and John Dobbins, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 1984.
TJ	<i>Hegels theologische Jugendschriften</i> , ed. by Herman Nohl, Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr 1907.
VGH	<i>Die Vernunft in der Geschichte</i> , ed. by Johannes Hoffmeister, 5th augmented edition, Leipzig: Felix Meiner 1955 (vol. 1 of <i>Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte</i> , vols 1–4, ed. by Georg Lasson and Johannes Hoffmeister, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1955).
VBG	<i>Vorlesungen über die Beweise Daseyn Gottes and Zum kosmologischen Gottesbeweis</i> , ed. by Walter Jaeschke, in <i>Gesammelte Werke</i> , vol. 18, <i>Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816–1831)</i> , Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1995.
VGP	<i>Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie</i> , vols 1–4, ed. by Pierre Garniron and Walter Jaeschke, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1986–96. (This corresponds to vols 6–9 in the edition, Hegel, <i>Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte</i> , vols 1–17, Hamburg: Meiner 1983–2008.)
VPR	<i>Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion</i> , Parts 1–3, ed. by Walter Jaeschke, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1983–85, 1993–95. (This corresponds to vols 3–5 in the edition, Hegel, <i>Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte</i> , vols 1–17, Hamburg: Meiner 1983–2008. Part 1, <i>Einleitung. Der Begriff der Religion</i> =vol. 3. Part 2, <i>Die Bestimmte Religion. a: Text</i> =vol. 4a. Part 2, <i>Die Bestimmte Religion. b: Anhang</i> =vol. 4b. Part 3, <i>Die vollendete Religion</i> =vol. 5.)

VPWG *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte: Berlin 1822–1823*,
ed. by Karl Heinz Ilting, Karl Brehmer, and Hoo Nam Seelmann,
Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1996. (This corresponds to vol. 12 in the
edition, Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte*,
vols 1–17, Hamburg: Meiner 1983–2008.)

All translations from the Bible come from the New Revised Standard Version.

Introduction

Around 1821 G. W. F. Hegel, professor of philosophy at the University of Berlin, met socially with one of his most promising students, the young poet Heinrich Heine. In the rather stiff and highly hierarchical academic world of Prussia at the time, the two enjoyed a surprising degree of familiarity for a student–teacher relation. Hegel seemed at ease with Heine and felt that he could openly reveal to him his opinions even on sensitive matters. This was by no means a straightforward matter since the Prussian authorities at the time were keen to stamp out any form of thinking in the spheres of politics and religion that might call their power into question. They routinely employed government spies and censors to identify those with unconventional or potentially dangerous views. Heine tells the following anecdote about their exchange:

One beautiful starry evening, we stood, the two of us, at a window, and I, a young person of twenty-two, having just eaten well and drunken coffee, spoke rapturously about the stars, calling them the habitations of the blessed. The master [sc. Hegel], however, mumbled to himself, “The stars, ho! hum! the stars are just leprous spots glowing on the sky.” For God’s sake—I cried—is there no happy place up there to reward virtue after death? Hegel just stared at me with his pale eyes and said cuttingly, “You took care of your sick mother, and you didn’t poison your brother. Do you really expect to receive a tip?” After these words, he looked around anxiously but seemed to grow calm soon afterwards when he saw that it was only Heinrich Beer approaching him to invite him to a round of whist.¹

Beer was one of Hegel’s trusted friends, and so the philosopher was relieved to see that their conversation had not been overheard by someone who might report it to the authorities. Hegel’s anxiety reveals much about his disposition to issues concerning religion. He was acutely aware of the sensitive nature of religious topics at the time. Likewise, he knew that there were no protections for professors even of the highest rank, who could be fired instantly if they were perceived to

¹ Heinrich Heine, ‘Geständnisse,’ in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–3, Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe 1854, vol. 1, pp. 61–2; ‘From Confessions,’ in *On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany and Other Writings*, ed. by Terry Pinkard and trans. by Howard Pollack-Milgate, Cambridge Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 206.

have crossed certain lines. This anecdote suggests that Hegel was guarded with respect to issues of religion and took some care to dissemble his true views.

This provides insight into the complexity of any attempt to interpret his statements on religion in a straightforward manner. Hegel's philosophy of religion is a complex subject that involves a large number of texts. Although he is known as a philosopher, Hegel had theological training and was interested in issues concerning religion all of his life. His philosophy cannot be separated from his religious views. His views on religion are intricately interwoven with the rest of his system. The present work attempts to offer an introduction to this body of material with a focus on the most extensive statement of his views on religion, namely, his Berlin *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

The work is premised on the idea that Hegel's intuitions about the nature of religion are largely motivated by the main trends in religion at the time, namely, what he perceived as the crisis of religion that arose as a result of new ways of thinking in the periods of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Thus, I will try to present his philosophy of religion as a reaction to key elements in these well-known intellectual movements. I believe that this approach allows us to make sense of Hegel's philosophy of religion and provides a broad appreciation for the nature of religious thought during his time.

0.1 Religion and Hegel's View of Systematic Philosophy

One of the trademarks of his philosophy is its claim to systematicity. He never tires of informing his readers that for philosophy to be a rigorous science, it must be a system. For example, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he writes, 'The true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of such truth.'² He further claims, 'knowledge is only actual and can only be expounded, as Science or as system.'³ Conversely, he regularly engages in polemics against different forms of thinking that he regards as unphilosophical because they do not display the proper systematic characteristic that he regards as essential: 'A philosophizing *without system* cannot be scientific at all; apart from the fact that philosophizing of this kind expresses on its own account a more subjective disposition, it is contingent with regard to its content. A content has its justification only as a moment of the whole, outside of which it is only an unfounded presupposition or a subjective certainty.'⁴

Hegel's basic intuition in this regard can be summed up in the famous slogan from the Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: 'The truth is the whole.'⁵ The guiding insight here is that a science is not merely an aggregate of facts put

² Hegel, *PhS*, p. 3; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 14.

⁴ Hegel, *EL*, § 14; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 60.

³ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 13; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 27.

⁵ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 11; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 24.

together in an elegant or convenient manner, but rather each individual part has a necessary relation to all the other parts. Thus, it has a specific and necessary place in the system. Philosophy represents a closed system that exhausts its subject matter. If anything were left out, then there would be something essential missing in the account it gives of the particular elements. Philosophy must thus include an account of everything. From this it follows that one cannot understand the nature of any individual part without having some sense of its role vis-à-vis the other parts.

Hegel's understanding of these relations is dialectical. One concept necessarily presupposes another in the way that being presupposes nothingness, the one presupposes the many, and unity presupposes plurality. Thus, one concept leads to another. For Hegel, this means that the systematic structure is dynamic rather than static in nature. He explains, "The science of [the Absolute] is essentially a *system*, since what is *concretely* true is so only in its inward self-unfolding and in taking and holding itself together in unity, i.e., as *totality*."⁶ In science the concepts organically develop into one another in a necessary manner that Hegel attempts to trace. This development follows the rules of Hegel's well-known dialectic, according to which specific concepts necessarily posit their opposite. In this way concepts develop or unfold and are in a constant movement.

Hegel also applies this reasoning to his account of the different world religions, which collectively develop the concept of the divine. The different peoples of world history are related to one another, each playing its own special role in the development of spirit. Their conceptions of the divine are likewise interrelated and, according to Hegel, can be traced and understood when the proper philosophical approach is used. Given Hegel's clear methodological statements about the systematic nature of his philosophy, it is odd that his philosophy of religion is usually treated either in a piecemeal fashion or in abstraction from the other parts of his thought. It is rarely understood in relation to, for example, his philosophy of history or his aesthetics, although there is significant overlap in the themes that are treated. Here a great opportunity has been missed for gaining a better understanding of Hegel's views on the different world religions.

0.2 Hegel's Published Corpus and System

Given Hegel's investment in systematic thinking, it makes sense that in order to appreciate the place and role of his philosophy of religion, we must see it in the context of his overall philosophical system. This will also allow us to understand why it is helpful and legitimate to make use of other parts of his system, besides

⁶ Hegel, *EL*, § 14; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 60.

the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, for an understanding of his views on religious phenomena. For this reason it will be imperative here at the outset briefly to gain an appreciation of the structure of Hegel's system. The nature and shape of Hegel's system is, of course, a large question that has been the object of considerable academic debate.⁷ It is impossible in this context to enter into a detailed account of this, and the task of the present study is not to make any new contribution to these discussions. However, for methodological reasons that will soon become apparent, it will be important to establish in a preliminary way a model of Hegel's system in order that the role of his philosophy of religion might become clear. Given the interconnected relations of the individual parts of the system, it is imperative that one gain an understanding of the relation of religion to the other fields of Hegel's attention.

Hegel's published four main books in his lifetime: the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807),⁸ the *Science of Logic*, in three volumes (1812, 1813, 1816),⁹ the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817),¹⁰ and the *Philosophy of Right* (1821).¹¹ What is the relationship of these works to each other and to the system as a whole?

Traditionally the role of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* has been particularly problematic since there have been debates about its status as the introduction to the system or as the first part of it.¹² There is, however, a general consensus that the *Phenomenology* is intended to be something propaedeutic to the actual system itself. It has been argued that the work grew out of control while Hegel was writing it, and for this reason he ended up with more than he intended, that is, not just an introduction to the system but the first part of it.¹³ Although Hegel's conception of the book changed as he continued to work on it, this changed conception is still consistent with an understanding of it as an introduction to the system per se. His methodology in the *Phenomenology* differs from that of the system insofar as it is specifically designed to refute a long series of dualisms by means of a kind of

⁷ See, for example, Hans Friedrich Fulda, *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels 'Wissenschaft der Logik'*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 1965. Otto Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee einer Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Freiburg and Munich: Karl Alber 1973. Johannes Heinrichs, *Die Logik der Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Bonn: Bouvier 1974.

⁸ Hegel, *System der Wissenschaft. Erster Theil, die Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Bamberg and Würzburg: Joseph Anton Goebhardt 1807.

⁹ Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik*, vols 1–3, Nuremberg: Johann Leonard Schrag 1812–16.

¹⁰ Hegel, *Encyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, Heidelberg: August Oßwald's Universitätsbuchhandlung 1817.

¹¹ Hegel, *Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse. Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung 1821.

¹² See, for example, Fulda, *Das Problem einer Einleitung in Hegels 'Wissenschaft der Logik'*. Horst Henning Ottmann, *Das Scheitern einer Einleitung in Hegels Philosophie. Eine Analyse der 'Phänomenologie des Geistes'*, Munich: Verlag Anton Pustet 1973.

¹³ See Otto Pöggeler, 'Die Komposition der Phänomenologie des Geistes,' in *Materialien zu Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. by Hans Friedrich Fulda and Dieter Henrich, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1973, pp. 329–90. Hans Friedrich Fulda, 'Zur Logik der Phänomenologie von 1807,' *ibid.*, pp. 391–425.

reductio ad absurdum strategy. This work is intended to be introductory in the sense that it presupposes the reader to be in possession of the views of common sense that must be refuted before one can begin the real work of science. More would, of course, have to be said to demonstrate this here,¹⁴ but for the present purposes this should suffice to show that the *Phenomenology of Spirit* does not represent Hegel's system as such since the system of science presupposes that these different forms of dualism have been eliminated.

The *Science of Logic* and the *Philosophy of Right*, while part of the system proper, are specialized studies. In other words, they treat the subject matter of, respectively, logic and social-political philosophy. They make no pretension to give any wider account of anything beyond the scope of the fields under examination. Since they are specialized studies, neither of these works can provide a complete system on its own.

It is the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* that presents the clearest systematic overview of Hegel's philosophy. There are several things that speak for this claim. First and foremost, the title itself as an 'encyclopaedia' indicates that the work is intended to provide a broad, if not exhaustive account of human knowing. Second, in the organization and content of the work it is clearly evident that it is meant to contain not a specialized study of a particular philosophical field, but rather an overview of all the 'philosophical sciences'. Thus, it is divided into three main parts: the logic, the philosophy of nature, and the philosophy of spirit, each of which contains further subdivisions reflecting the individual fields. The other parts of Hegel's published corpus can be seen as elaborations of the basic framework set forth in the *Encyclopedia*.¹⁵

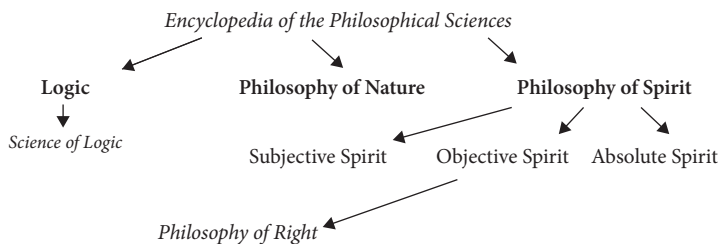
Moreover, the content of both the *Science of Logic* and the *Philosophy of Right*, as specialized sciences, can be seen to fit into the organizational plan of the *Encyclopedia*. The *Science of Logic* is obviously a more detailed account of the material treated in the first part of the *Encyclopedia*, which is dedicated to the first philosophical science, that is, logic. Both of these texts are divided into three main sections, 'The Doctrine of Being', 'The Doctrine of Essence', and 'The Doctrine of

¹⁴ I have tried to argue this in more detail in my *The Unity of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: A Systematic Interpretation*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2000.

¹⁵ Hegel had this systematic structure in mind from a fairly early period as is evidenced by the so-called *Jenaer Systementwürfe* or what is also known as the *Realphilosophie*, that is, drafts of a philosophical system that he worked on during his years in Jena prior to writing the *Phenomenology*. The overall outlines of the system that appear in these drafts bear a general similarity to the *Encyclopedia*. These works are as follows in German: *Jenaer Systementwürfe*, vols 6–8 of *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by the Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1968ff. The English translations are as follows: G. W. F. Hegel. *The Jena System, 1804–5. Logic and Metaphysics*, translation edited by John W. Burbidge and George di Giovanni, Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1986. *The Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805–6)* in *Hegel and the Human Spirit*, trans. by Leo Rauch, Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1983. *First Philosophy of Spirit* in G. W. F. Hegel, *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, ed. and trans. by H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox, Albany, New York: SUNY Press 1979.

the Concept'. Moreover, they both follow the same sequence of categories through their speculative development.

Similarly, the *Philosophy of Right* is an obvious elaboration of the 'Objective Spirit' section of the third part of the *Encyclopedia*.¹⁶ As in the *Philosophy of Right*, this corresponding section in the *Encyclopedia* is divided into three main sections, each of which has its analogue in the *Philosophy of Right*, although these correspondences are obscured somewhat in the standard English translations. The first section of 'Objective Spirit' from the *Encyclopedia* is entitled 'Das Recht' (translated as 'Law'),¹⁷ which corresponds to the first large section of the *Philosophy of Right*, 'Das abstrakte Recht', that is, 'Abstract Right'. The second section of 'Objective Spirit' from the *Encyclopedia* is entitled 'Die Moralität' (translated freely as 'The Morality of Conscience'),¹⁸ which clearly corresponds to the second main part of the *Philosophy of Right*, which bears the same title. Finally, the third section of 'Objective Spirit' from the *Encyclopedia* is entitled 'Die Sittlichkeit' (translated as 'The Moral Life or Social Ethics'),¹⁹ which includes an analysis of 'The Family', 'Civil Society', and 'The State'. This corresponds straightforwardly to the long third section in the *Philosophy of Right* with the same title (translated as 'Ethical Life').²⁰ Given this, the following overview of Hegel's system (Figure 0.1), based on the *Encyclopedia*, emerges:



In addition to these obvious structural parallels, Hegel writes directly in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*: 'This textbook is a more extensive, and in particular a more systematic, exposition of the same basic concepts which, in relation to this part of philosophy, are already contained in a previous work designed to accompany my lectures, namely, my *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Heidelberg 1817).'²¹ By this it is clear that he is referring to the 'Objective Spirit' section in the *Encyclopedia*.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, §§ 483–551; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 382–445. Here I modify the translation of 'Geist' from *Phil. of Mind* to 'Spirit'.

¹⁷ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, §§ 483–502; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 382–91.

¹⁸ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, §§ 503–12; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 391–7.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, §§ 513–52; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 397–445.

²⁰ Hegel, *PR*, §§ 142–360; *Jub.*, vol. 7, pp. 226–456.

²¹ Hegel, *PR*, § 1; *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 19.

Although the original text of the *Encyclopedia* was published in 1817, Hegel continued to work on this material and a decade later, in 1827, published an augmented second edition.²² As he himself noted in the passage from the *Philosophy of Right* quoted just above, the *Encyclopedia* was a textbook that he used in his lectures; indeed, on the title page of the work itself, it reads ‘*Zum Gebrauch seiner Vorlesungen*’. As he continued to give courses based on this text, he continued to develop his thought with new illustrations and analyses.²³ The second edition more than doubled the size of the work. While the first edition contained 477 numbered sections or paragraphs, spanning 288 pages, the second edition ballooned to 574 sections, covering 534 pages. Finally, only three years after this, in 1830, Hegel published a third edition,²⁴ which contained the same number of individual sections but grew in length to exactly 600 pages. This is the only text in Hegel’s corpus that he continued to rework so extensively in this manner.

One motivation for continually revising this work was presumably the fact that as his philosophy became better known, Hegel came to be criticized more frequently by people who, he felt, did not always have an adequate grasp of his thought. For example, the famous slogan from the *Philosophy of Right*, ‘What is rational, is actual, and what is actual, is rational,’²⁵ became the source of much misunderstanding, with critical voices taking Hegel to be issuing a simple-minded and naïve apology for the existing order.²⁶ Hegel used the second edition of the *Encyclopedia* as an occasion to return to this passage and explain it in more detail in order to obviate the confusion.²⁷ His critics likewise claimed that his conception of world spirit amounted in the end to a form of pantheism.²⁸ Once again Hegel seized the opportunity presented by the publication of the new edition of the *Encyclopedia* to make a defence of his philosophy by distinguishing his view from pantheism.²⁹

²² Hegel, *Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, 2nd ed., Heidelberg: August Oßwald 1827.

²³ In Berlin Hegel taught the *Encyclopedia* in Winter Semester 1818–19 and Winter Semester 1826–27. See ‘Übersicht über Hegels Berliner Vorlesungen’ in the edition of Hegel’s *Berliner Schriften: 1818–1831*, ed. by Johannes Hoffmeister, Hamburg: Meiner 1956, pp. 743–9.

²⁴ Hegel, *Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, 3rd ed., Heidelberg: Verwaltung des Oßwald’schen Verlags (C. F. Winter) 1830.

²⁵ Hegel, *PR*, Preface, p. 29; *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 33.

²⁶ See M. W. Jackson, ‘Hegel: The Real and the Rational,’ in *The Hegel Myths and Legends*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 1996, pp. 19–25. Yirmiahu Yovel, ‘Hegel’s Dictum that the Rational Is the Actual and the Actual Is Rational: Its Ontological Content and Its Function in Discourse,’ *ibid.*, pp. 26–41. Emil L. Fackenheim, ‘On the Actuality of the Rational and the Rationality of the Actual,’ *ibid.*, pp. 42–9.

²⁷ Hegel, *Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, Zweite Ausgabe, Heidelberg: August Oßwald 1827, § 6. *EL*, § 6; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 48.

²⁸ See August Tholuck, *Blüthensammlung aus der Morganländischen Mystik nebst einer Einleitung über Mystik überhaupt und Morgenländische insbesondere*, Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler 1825. See also August Tholuck, *Die Lehre von der Sünde und vom Versöhner, oder Die wahre Weihe des Zweiflers*, 2nd ed., Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes 1825 (1823). (Hegel refers to this second edition of Tholuck’s work in the Preface to the second edition, *EL*, p. 13, note; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 19, note.)

²⁹ See Hegel, *Encyclopädie*. Zweite Ausgabe, § 573. *Phil. of Mind*, § 573; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 458–74. See also the Preface to the second edition, *EL*, pp. 4–17; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 7–24.

0.3 The First Collected Works Edition: The Publication of the Lectures

When Hegel died in 1831 his students founded the 'Society of the Friends of the Deceased'.³⁰ The goal of this society was to produce the first complete edition of his collected works.³¹ An editorial board was created consisting of a number of scholars from several different fields.³² They published this influential edition from 1832–45 under the title, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*.³³

These editors were sensitive and sympathetic to Hegel's claims about the integrity of the system. It was therefore natural for them to make it the unspoken objective of the new edition to present his thought as a complete system of philosophy. Unlike philologists today, who are keen to examine in detail every early fragment in order to trace meticulously every twist and turn in a given author's course of development, these initial editors regarded Hegel's system as a single, continuous monolith that existed in some form or another almost from the very beginning of his authorship. Their goal was thus to present this timeless structure in a form that was as complete as possible without getting too bogged down in questions of development or apparent changes in direction. They had seen the ridicule that Schelling had been subjected to, when critics had claimed that he presented a new conception of his system with virtually each new publication and was thus educating himself in public.³⁴ They understandably wanted to avoid giving the impression with their edition that Hegel was guilty

³⁰ See John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980, p. 204.

³¹ See Wilhelm Raimund Beyer, 'Wie die Hegelsche Freundesvereinsausgabe entstand,' in his *Denken und Bedenken. Hegel-Aufsätze*, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag 1977, pp. 277–86. Karl Ludwig Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel*, vols 1–2, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1837–38, vol. 2, pp. 636–8. Walter Jaeschke, *Hegel Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Schule*, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler 2003, pp. 502–4. Lothar Wigger, '75 Jahre kritische Hegel-Ausgaben: Zu Geschichte und Stand der Hegel-Edition,' *Pädagogische Rundschau*, vol. 41, 1987, pp. 102–4.

³² This is a somewhat simplified account. See Christoph Jamme, 'Editionspolitik. Zur Freundesvereinsausgabe der Werke G. W. F. Hegels,' *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1984, pp. 85–6. The original board was comprised of the historian Friedrich Förster (1791–1868), the jurist Eduard Gans (1798–1839), the art critic and historian Heinrich Gustav Hotho (1802–73), the theologians Philipp Marheineke (1780–1846) and Johannes Schulze (1786–1869), and the philosophers Karl Ludwig Michelet (1801–93) and Leopold von Henning (1791–1866). This initial group was later enlarged when three other scholars joined in the undertaking: Hegel's elder son, the historian Karl Hegel (1813–1901), the philologist Ludwig Boumann (1801–71), and the philosopher Karl Rosenkranz (1805–79).

³³ *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, vols 1–18, ed. by Ludwig Boumann, Friedrich Förster, Eduard Gans, Karl Hegel, Leopold von Henning, Heinrich Gustav Hotho, Philipp Marheineke, Karl Ludwig Michelet, Karl Rosenkranz, Johannes Schulze, Berlin: Verlag von Duncker und Humblot 1832–45.

³⁴ See Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1844, p. 45.

of the same thing. Thus, they wanted to present a system that was complete, self-enclosed, and internally consistent.

In addition to Hegel's primary texts, his students also published his lectures: the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*,³⁵ the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*,³⁶ the *Lectures on Aesthetics*,³⁷ and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.³⁸ They saw these lectures as an integral part of his system and indeed regarded them on a par with the published works. These publications of the lectures were collations from both student notes taken during Hegel's various lectures in Berlin and, where possible, from Hegel's own notes. Although these were not books, strictly speaking, that is, finished works from Hegel's own hand, his students believed that they nonetheless rightly belonged to his philosophical corpus. The editors regarded the lectures as further elaborations on Hegel's written statements of the individual parts of the system. Thus, in a sense the system, they believed, reached its greatest degree of completion not in print but in its oral presentation in the lecture hall.³⁹ This belief influenced their editorial practice and policies. They attempted to present the lectures in such a way that they were seen to be in complete harmony with Hegel's published works and indeed that there was a seamless transition from one to the other.

Each of these lectures can also be seen as an elaboration of some part of the *Encyclopedia*. The *Encyclopedia* ends with the third and final section of the 'Philosophy of Spirit', namely, 'Absolute Spirit'.⁴⁰ This culminating triad of Hegel's system, as presented there, consists of three parts: 'Art', 'Revealed Religion', and 'Philosophy', which correspond to the highest forms of human knowing. The first part, 'Art',⁴¹ straightforwardly corresponds to Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, the second part, 'Revealed Religion',⁴² to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, and the third part, 'Philosophy',⁴³ to the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

The most difficult lecture series to place is the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. However, a careful examination shows that this corresponds to the subsection that immediately precedes the section 'Absolute Spirit'. In 'Objective

³⁵ *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, ed. by Eduard Gans, vol. 9 (1837), in *Hegel's Werke*.

³⁶ *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, I–III, ed. by Karl Ludwig Michelet, vols 13–15 (1833–36), in *Hegel's Werke*.

³⁷ *Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik*, I–III, ed. by Heinrich Gustav Hotho, vols 10.1–3 (1835–38), in *Hegel's Werke*.

³⁸ *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, I–II, ed. by Philipp Marheineke, vols 11–12 (1832), in *Hegel's Werke*.

³⁹ See Jamme, 'Editionspolitik. Zur Freundesvereinsausgabe der Werke G. W. F. Hegels,' pp. 89ff.

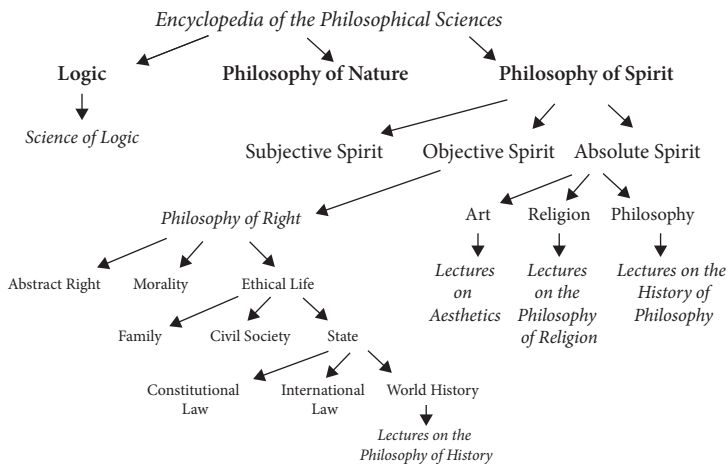
⁴⁰ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, §§ 553–77; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 446–75. Here I modify the translation of 'Geist' from *Phil. of Mind* to 'Spirit'.

⁴¹ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, §§ 556–63; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 447–52.

⁴² Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, §§ 564–71; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 453–8.

⁴³ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, §§ 572–7; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 458–76.

Spirit', the final section is dedicated to the state. The final part of this section concerns the development of states in history. It bears the title, 'World History'.⁴⁴ As noted, 'Objective Spirit' corresponds to the material treated in the *Philosophy of Right*, and this work also contains a section at the end dedicated to world history.⁴⁵ This section from the *Philosophy of Right* thus corresponds to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. Hegel makes this connection to the *Philosophy of Right* clear at the beginning of his lectures.⁴⁶ This is thus the section from the *Encyclopedia* that corresponds to the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. This results in Figure 0.2 of the role of the lectures in the system as a whole:



All of these lectures overlap in the sense that they all at least in part treat their subject matter in a chronological or historical manner; thus, each lecture series examines material in the different fields from the same time periods, as it were, exploring different aspects of culture of a given historical people. For example, Greek history, Greek art, Greek religion, and Greek philosophy are treated in the corresponding series of lectures on these different fields. But there is, needless to say, a fair amount of overlap in them since Hegel often covers the same subject matter but from a slightly different perspective.

The interconnected relations among the different parts of the system offer useful opportunities to supplement Hegel's accounts of the different religions. Hegel's philosophy of religion develops in parallel to his philosophy of history,

⁴⁴ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, §§ 548–52; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 426–45.

⁴⁵ Hegel, *PR*, §§ 341–60; *Jub.*, vol. 7, pp. 446–56.

⁴⁶ Hegel, *LPWHI*, p. 11; *VGH*, p. 3: 'I have no textbook on which to base my lectures; but in my *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §§ 341–60 (i.e., the conclusion), I have already defined the concept of world history proper, as well as the principles or periods into which its study can be divided. This work should enable you to gain at least an abstract knowledge of those moments of world history with which we shall be concerned here.'

aesthetics, and history of philosophy. At each stage of historical development there is a specific form of spirit which expresses itself in the different spheres: politics, art, philosophy, etc. This means that the religion of a given people never develops entirely in isolation but rather always in connection with other cultural spheres.⁴⁷ In trying to understand Hegel's philosophy of religion and his views on religion at any given point in time, one can thus profitably make use of what he says about the nature of spirit in the other cultural areas at the same historical epoch. In addition to treating, for example, the Egyptian religion in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he also gives accounts of it, from different angles, in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* and *Lectures on Aesthetics*. This is by no means an idiosyncratic treatment of the Egyptian religion, but rather in his other lectures there appear parallel accounts of almost all of the different religions that correspond to the more extended treatments given in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Hegel gave these different series of lectures periodically during the same time period that he was in Berlin. It is therefore natural that they overlap on certain points and that he reworked some of the same material in the different contexts. But it does not stop here. Hegel also treats different religions in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in scattered comments in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Given the systematic nature of his project, all of these materials can be used to supplement his statements in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

It should be noted that in addition to these works which can be regarded as representing Hegel's mature system, there is a further body of material known as *Hegel's Early Theological Writings*, which is also relevant for his views on religion.⁴⁸ This material consists of a handful of essays that Hegel worked on from around 1795 to 1800, that is, during his years as a private tutor, before he received his first academic position in Jena. Hegel never published these works, and they only appeared in print in 1907. This material represents a somewhat different view from that of the mature Hegel, and for this reason in the present study it has been

⁴⁷ See Hegel, *TE*, p. 56; *TJ*, p. 27: 'The spirit of a nation is reflected in its history, its religion, and the degree of its political freedom; and these cannot be taken in isolation when considering either their individual character or their influence on each other. They are bound together as one.' See also Hegel's account of the relation of religion to history in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (*Phil. of Hist.*, p. 335; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 429): 'The distinction between religion and the world is only this—that religion as such is reason in the soul and heart—that it is a temple in which truth and freedom in God are presented to the conceptive faculty: the state, on the other hand, regulated by the selfsame reason, is the temple of human freedom concerned with the perception and volition of a reality, whose purport may itself be called divine.' *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 335; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 429: 'The process displayed in history is only the manifestation of religion as human reason—the production of the religious principle which dwells in the heart of man, under the form of secular freedom.'

⁴⁸ *Hegels theologische Jugendschriften*, ed. by Herman Nohl, Tübingen: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr 1907. In English as *Early Theological Writings*, trans. by T. M. Knox, 'Fragments' trans. by Richard Kroner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1948; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1975.

used only in an ad hoc manner and has not been made the object of detailed analysis in its own right.

0.4 A Problem with Hegel's Historical Account

The historical story that Hegel wants to tell about the development of the different conceptions of the divine culminates with Christianity in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. This, however, presents an interesting problem; namely, there is a troublesome disanalogy between this account and Hegel's other lectures, which do not stop at this point but instead continue their story up to Hegel's own day. The *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* do not stop with the Roman world but instead go on to treat the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. Similarly, the *Lectures on Aesthetics* do not stop with Roman art, but go on to treat the art of the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and Romanticism. Finally, the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* do not stop with his account of Christianity but instead go on to treat the Scholastic philosophy of the Middle Ages, and Modern Philosophy including German idealism, and ending with Schelling.

When one compares the place of Christianity in these other lectures with that in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the disanalogy is striking. It is extraordinarily odd that the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* do not progress chronologically any further than they do. When one looks at the specific analyses that Hegel gives in these lectures, one sees that most of them in fact correspond to what he, in other lectures, designates 'The Oriental World'. The Greek and Roman religions are also given a significant place in the overall treatment, as in the other lectures. But then Hegel gives his account of Christianity, and the lectures abruptly end, while the other series of lectures continue far beyond the historical period in which Christianity arose. This disanalogy seems problematic given Hegel's systematic pretensions.

What can be concluded from this is that while it is natural to make use of these lectures in any study of Hegel's thoughts on religion, this cannot be the final word on the matter. Hegel surely cannot believe that the development of religion or of the concept of the divine stops with the birth of Christianity. He surely was not ignorant of the almost two millennia of historical development that took place between then and his own time.

One can well imagine many different reasons to explain this disanalogy. It has been suggested that Hegel was in fear of the Prussian authorities and did not want to be seen as holding unorthodox or free-thinking religious views.⁴⁹ At the turn of

⁴⁹ See, for example, Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1983, pp. 580ff. There is a parallel to this issue in Hegel's political philosophy. See

the century, he had seen Fichte lose his position in the so-called *Atheismus Streit*.⁵⁰ Later in the 1820s when Hegel received his position in Berlin, the political climate was tense due to the rise of the student associations or *Burschenschaften* and their nationalistic calls for pan-German unity. His appointment came around the time of the Karlsbad Decrees, which were proclaimed in 1819 as a measure for clamping down on progressive-minded students. Professors who sympathized with them were branded 'demagogues' and severely punished. In this context Hegel's long-time rival Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843) and his Berlin colleague Wilhelm de Wette (1780–1849) were unceremoniously sacked from their positions at their respective universities.⁵¹

Thus, it is argued that Hegel carefully kept secret his true views about religion and cleverly concealed them behind the veil of a difficult philosophy with a specialized language that took years of study to grasp. He never dared to risk publishing a work dedicated exclusively to religion and instead confined himself to presenting the enormous amount of material that he had on the subject solely in lectures. The idea that Hegel tried to keep his true religious views secret borrows from a motif from the pioneering work in Hegel studies in the Anglophone world, namely, *The Secret of Hegel: Being the Hegelian System in Origin, Principle, Form, and Matter* by James Hutchison Stirling.⁵² In this work Stirling wants to argue that the secret consisted in the fact that Hegel was a Christian. It is claimed that Hegel's philosophy amounted to a defence of Christianity at a highly abstract level. But Hegel hardly makes a secret of this. Indeed, he is quite explicit in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* that his goal is to defend and justify Christianity as the sole true religion. If anything, his secret consists in the fact that his defence of Christianity is one that he knew would not sit well with the conservative religious orthodoxy of his day.

Subsequent authors have called this into question, arguing just the opposite, namely, that Hegel's secret was that he was a critic of Christianity but was so fearful of the authorities that he had to keep this carefully guarded. If one follows the logic of this view, one could argue that Hegel was put in an awkward situation due to his own methodology. According to his account of the dialectical development of history, he seems to be obliged to continue to tell the story of the further development of the world religions up until his own day. However, to do so would lead him to conclude that Christianity is not the highest form of religion, corresponding to Absolute Knowing, but rather merely another sublated religion that

Hans-Christian Lucas and Udo Rameil, 'Furcht vor der Zensur? Zur Entstehungs- und Druckgeschichte von Hegels *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*,' *Hegel-Studien*, vol. 15, 1980, pp. 63–93.

⁵⁰ For a useful collection of the primary sources in English, see J. G. Fichte and the *Atheism Dispute* (1798–1800), ed. by Yolanda Estes and Curtis Bowman, Aldershot: Ashgate 2010.

⁵¹ See below Chapter 3, Section 3.6.

⁵² James Hutchison Stirling, *The Secret of Hegel: Being the Hegelian System in Origin, Principle, Form, and Matter*, vols 1–2, London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green 1865.

world history has passed through at a previous stage. If he had continued his account, he would have risked being obliged to portray other later religions, such as Islam, as conceptually higher than Christianity due to their later appearance in the chronological sequence. In order to avoid this potentially dangerous conclusion, Hegel simply opted to end his lectures with Christianity and drop the matter there. According to this interpretation, he was thus anxious not to invite further discussion that might potentially expose this methodological inconsistency.

One might point out that Hegel's methodology would not necessarily put him in this position. He might well be able to show that all subsequent developments in the history of religion were negative ones, and that Christianity was in fact the apex of the development of the concept of the divine. This would in a sense be like what he says in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* when he claims that sculpture reached its highpoint with the Greeks and painting with the Italians. While this may be the case with these specific genres of art, the development of art in general continues and seeks new forms of expression that are in tune with the changing times. So one would also expect that the concept of the divine would not simply remain dormant after Christianity. One would expect it also to develop into different forms as spirit develops in history. In any case, it is difficult to escape the feeling that Hegel owes his readers some kind of explanation here.

This may well be an avenue worth pursuing, but for the present purposes the issue of Hegel's concrete motivation for not continuing the historical sequence or the question of his moral fibre in concealing his true views is ultimately not of primary interest. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how one could ever definitively resolve the question of Hegel's *secret*. Instead, the question concerns the inner logic and structure of Hegel's system as such, and from this perspective it is clear that he is obliged to say more about the historical development of the world religions than he does in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

Indeed, a careful look reveals that Hegel does in fact do this, but it is necessary to know where to look for these supplementary analyses. This can perhaps be regarded as another *secret* of Hegel, namely, that his discussions of the further development of the concept in religion after Christianity take place in his other lectures, that is, in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. This is where we must go to supplement his obviously incomplete account in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

In this work I will focus primarily on the general analysis as it is presented in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* since it is there that the most comprehensive statement of Hegel's mature view on religion is given. However, since his thought is conceived as a system, it is possible to supplement this with many of the other texts and lectures where he speaks of the same issues in different contexts. Thus, although the present study will conceive of Hegel's philosophy of religion in a sense as a single entity, which is best represented in his lectures, it will need to make use of other texts to fill out and complete the picture. I will thus intersperse other analyses from his other works into the discussions as needed.

A new perspective comes from this procedure. As has been noted, Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* conclude with Christianity as the highest form of religious knowing. For this reason, Hegel has usually been read as a defender of Christianity to the exclusion of other religions. However, as just noted, when one looks at his other series of lectures, these do not stop with his account of the Roman world (that is, the stage corresponding to where the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* end), but instead continue the narrative up to Hegel's own time. Thus, in these other lectures one can find both Hegel's view of the further development of Christianity, for example, in the Reformation and his critical assessment of religions such as Islam or Deism, which arose historically after Christianity. Here one can see that the story that Hegel began in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is clearly not finished. He needs to give some explanation for why he believes that the later developments of religion—Islam and Deism—do not surpass or sublate Christianity but instead are, in his view, retrograde movements.

By regarding things in this way, we are able to open up new perspectives on Hegel's thought about religion and its development, not least of all in the modern world. Our goal will thus be to trace this development beyond the origins of Christianity and up to Hegel's own day. While his treatments of religion are, of course, not as elaborate in these other lectures as they are in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, nonetheless they do provide clear hints that allow us to reconstruct his position.

0.5 The Editions of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*

During his tenure in Berlin Hegel delivered his lecture course on the philosophy of religion four times, always in the summer semester: in 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831.⁵³ In the summer semester of 1829 he also gave a course on the proofs of the existence of God. The first edition of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by the theologian Philipp Marheineke (1780–1846), combined the lecture notes available from these different courses and created a single running text. This edition played an enormous role in the history of the work's reception since it was the focal point of the critical debates surrounding Hegel's philosophy and was in many ways the key text that caused the split among Hegel's followers, thus creating the schools of right and left Hegelianism. Despite this important role, Marheineke's edition immediately became the target of criticism.

Marheineke had a fair amount of material at his disposal in creating this edition. He had a more or less complete set of notes from Hegel himself from

⁵³ See 'Übersicht über Hegels Berliner Vorlesungen,' in the edition of Hegel's *Berliner Schriften: 1818–1831*, pp. 743–9.

his first lecture in 1821.⁵⁴ He also had a series of student notes from the lectures from 1824, 1827, and 1831.⁵⁵ He was obliged to make a selection of what material to include and what material to leave out. He could, at his discretion, choose to emphasize certain aspects of Hegel's lectures at the expense of others. This procedure invariably reflected in some way the interests and understanding of the editor, and there was inevitably a degree of arbitrariness about it. It was argued that some of this was wilful since Marheineke and the other editors of the complete works edition had their own ideological investments in Hegel saying one thing or another. They therefore let these investments guide their principles of selection, it is claimed, so that Hegel would be presented as saying what they thought he should say.⁵⁶ The suspicion was that Hegel was made to look more orthodox and less radical than he actually was.⁵⁷ This suspicion gave rise to controversies in the period after Hegel's death when there were animated struggles for his heritage.

An attempt was made to respond to the critics by creating a second edition of Hegel's lectures, which appeared in 1840.⁵⁸ Marheineke still appeared as the editor of the work, but the actual editing was carried out by Bruno Bauer. An attempt was made to revise the material by incorporating new sets of lecture notes beyond those used by Marheineke.⁵⁹ This second edition expanded and changed the text of the first edition, but the critics were not appeased since nothing of the basic editorial procedure had been changed. It was still thought that too much power

⁵⁴ See Marheineke's 'Vorrede des Herausgebers,' in his edition of Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, I–II, ed. by Philipp Marheineke, vols 11–12 (1832), in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 11, pp. v–xiv.

⁵⁵ Marheineke was using student notes from the transcripts of Karl Gustav von Griseheim (from the 1824 course), a Swiss student named Meyer (from 1827) and Hegel's son Karl (from 1831). According to Marheineke, Hegel himself made use of these student transcripts in subsequent lectures. See 'Vorrede des Herausgebers,' pp. vi–vii.

⁵⁶ See Jamme, 'Editionspolitik. Zur Freundesvereinsausgabe der Werke G. W. F. Hegels,' pp. 83–99. Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, 'H.G. Hotho: Kunst als Bildungserlebnis und Kunstgeschichte in Systematischer Absicht—oder die entpolitisierte Version der ästhetischen Erziehung der Menschen,' in *Kunsterfahrung und Kulturpolitik im Berlin Hegels*, ed. by Otto Pöggeler and Annemarie Gethmann-Siefert, Bonn: Bouvier 1983 (*Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 22), pp. 229–62. Walter Jaeschke, 'Probleme der Edition der Nachschriften von Hegels Vorlesungen,' *Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, vol. 3, 1980, pp. 51–63. Walter Jaeschke, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion: The Quest for a Critical Edition,' *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1980, pp. 4–8.

⁵⁷ See *Briefwechsel zwischen Bruno und Edgar Bauer während der Jahre 1838–1842 aus Bonn und Berlin*, Charlottenburg: Verlag von Egbert Bauer 1844, pp. 48–51.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, I–II, ed. by Philipp Marheineke, vols 11–12 (2nd ed., 1840), in *Hegel's Werke*.

⁵⁹ In addition to the materials used by Marheineke, Bauer used the notes of Leopold von Henning (from the 1821 course), Karl Ludwig Michelet (from 1824), Friedrich Förster (from 1824), Gustav Droysen (from 1827), one Geyer (from 1831), Reichenow (from 1831), and Rutenberg (from 1831). In his account of this Marheineke states that this second edition also availed itself of a newly discovered envelope (*Convolut*) full of drafts of the material that Hegel made use of when preparing his lectures. See Marheineke's 'Vorrede zur zweiten Auflage,' in the second edition of Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, I–II, ed. by Philipp Marheineke, vols 11–12 (2nd ed., 1840), in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 11, pp. v–x, see pp. vi–vii.

was placed in the hands of the editors. Due to its importance for the history of its reception, this edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and indeed the entire *Werke* edition was reprinted in a photomechanical reproduction by Hermann Glockner (1896–1979) for the hundred-year jubilee of the original edition from 1928–1941.⁶⁰ However, no new philological work was done.

Almost a century after the first edition, Georg Lasson (1862–1932) attempted to redress the problems of the texts produced by Marheineke and Bauer with an entirely new edition of the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, which appeared from 1925 to 1929 in the context of Lasson's new complete works edition of Hegel.⁶¹ Lasson took as his basic point of departure Hegel's own lecture notes from 1821 and structured the entire text based on this. Since the student notes used by Marheineke and Bauer were no longer extant, Lasson was obliged to track down surviving student lecture notes that he incorporated in such a way as to follow the established structure.⁶² He thus organized his edition into three parts (in four volumes) following Hegel's basic division of the material into 1) 'The Concept of Religion', 2) 'Determinate Religion', and 3) 'The Absolute Religion'. The result of Lasson's efforts was a larger edition than the one produced by Marheineke and Bauer.

While Lasson's edition provided more information, it failed to solve the basic problem of the original edition, namely, the all too prominent role of the editor in the construction of the text. Attentive readers argued that it was wholly irresponsible from a philological perspective to combine Hegel's text with student notes. Moreover, both the original edition and Lasson's edition aimed to create a single readable, coherent text, but in order to do so, they had to mix together Hegel's lectures from different years. But Hegel's lectures over the period of a decade were quite different from one another, and this editorial principle made it impossible for the reader to discern the development in his thinking.

The new critical edition by Walter Jaeschke, which appeared from 1982 to 1985, took an entirely new approach in an effort to resolve these long-standing

⁶⁰ Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe*, vols 1–20, ed. by Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1928–41 (hereafter *Jub.*). The two volumes of the *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, appear as volumes 15 and 16 of this edition. Due to the importance of the edition of Marheineke and Bauer and the wide availability of the *Jubiläumsausgabe*, this edition has been used extensively in this study.

⁶¹ Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Georg Lasson, Leipzig: Felix Meiner 1920–. The relevant volumes are vol. 12: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Erster Teil, *Begriff der Religion* (1925); vol. 13.1: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Zweiter Teil, *Die Bestimmte Religion*, Erstes Kapitel, *Die Naturreligion* (1927); vol. 13.2: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Zweiter Teil, *Die Bestimmte Religion*, Zweites Kapitel, *Die Religionen der geistigen Individualität* (1929); vol. 14: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, Dritter Teil, *Die absolute Religion* (1929). This edition of the *Sämtliche Werke* remained incomplete when Lasson died in 1932 but was continued by Johannes Hoffmeister (1907–55) beginning in 1952.

⁶² Lasson used transcripts of Hegel's lectures from Heinrich Gustav Hotho (from the course from 1824), Victor von Kehler (from 1824), Carl Pastenaci (from 1824), Johann Eduard Erdmann (from 1827), and an anonymous set of notes from 1827.

problems.⁶³ The new principle was to separate the individual lecture courses and present them individually. Thus for each of this edition's three volumes, the different texts from 1821, 1824, 1827, and 1831 are presented side by side. This edition selects one text as the *Leittext* or guide and others as the *Kontrolltexte*.⁶⁴ Although Jaeschke did not have at his disposal all of the materials from the previous editions since many of the student lecture notes used by the previous editors had been lost, his outstanding edition provides a number of useful benefits to the reader. By separating the lectures chronologically in this way, this edition allows the reader for the first time to see how Hegel's accounts of the individual religions developed. So now it is possible to determine with more precision when he read specific sources or when his thought on specific issues changed.

With this edition, it becomes clear that Hegel's claims to systematicity, for whatever their merits in other parts of the system, are somewhat dubious with respect to the complex sphere of religious phenomena. In the different lectures one can see that while he continues to add new information, he often struggles to integrate it with his previous understanding. He is sometimes unsure of the proper placement of a given religion in the sequence and experiments with different possibilities. While Hegel is often saddled with the charge of being heavy-handed and imposing his own a priori structures on the world, thus distorting the actual historical or empirical phenomena under analysis,⁶⁵ here we see a quite different picture of a Hegel at great pains to understand the different world religions and respect their specific details as much as possible. Here the traditional picture of Hegel as a strict systematician must yield to a somewhat unaccustomed one as an experimenter constantly open to new empirical information.⁶⁶

Jaeschke's edition allows us to study Hegel's lectures with a degree of precision that was not possible before. It is an outstanding new tool for the study of Hegel's

⁶³ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, vols 1–3, ed. by Walter Jaeschke, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1983–85. This work consists of Teil 1, *Einleitung. Der Begriff der Religion* (1983); Teil 2, *Die bestimmte Religion* (1985 (in 2 volumes)); Teil 3, *Die vollendete Religion* (1984). (This work constitutes vols 3–5 in the edition Hegel, *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* (Hamburg: Meiner 1983–) (which is a part of *Gesammelte Werke (Akademieausgabe)*, ed. by the Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Hamburg: Meiner 1968–).) (English translation: *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, vols 1–3, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, trans. by Robert F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart with the assistance of H. S. Harris, Berkeley et al.: University of California Press 1984–87, here *LPR*.)

⁶⁴ For the 1821 lectures, the student notes have been lost, and so only Hegel's notes remain as the *Leittext*. For the 1824 lectures Jaeschke uses Greisheim's notes as the guide text, which is supplemented by the notes of F. P. Dieters, Hotho, von Kehler, and Pastenaci. For the 1827 text use is made of the notes from Ignacy Börner, Joseph Hube, and an anonymous transcript. For the 1831 lectures David Friedrich Strauss' notes have been used. See the useful overview of the materials and these philological matters in the 'Editorial Introduction', in *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 1–81.

⁶⁵ See Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. by J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1990, p. 272.

⁶⁶ See Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion*, p. 277: 'Instead of being subject to the supposedly rigid compulsion of logical principles of construction, his treatment of the history of religion forms an experimental field in which virtually everything is tried out.'

philosophy of religion. However, it does not follow that we should simply from now on dismiss and ignore all of the other editions. Polemics have always followed the production of each new edition, but there is no need to get entangled in these technical philological discussions. Each of these editions provides useful information relevant for Hegel's philosophy of religion, and they can all be used productively. While the philological approaches are, of course, quite different, they all give us different glimpses of Hegel's views on religion and are thus valuable. Most importantly, the different editions avail themselves of different student notes, and thus all of them represent useful sources of information that can be used alongside one another.

0.6 The Theses of the Present Study

While the present study is intended to serve as an introduction to Hegel's philosophy of religion generally, this is not to say that it does not contain a critical or polemical agenda. When Hegel's philosophy of religion is placed in the context of its concrete time and place, a number of issues emerge that have not always been adequately acknowledged in the secondary literature. In what follows I wish to argue for a handful of theses which proceed from the general approach taken here.

First, I wish to demonstrate that much of Hegel's agenda in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* comes from his reaction to the Enlightenment. Specifically, he believes that this movement has deprived religion of all its meaningful content. A key feature of what he regards as the religious crisis of his own day is that this lack of content leads to confusion about religion and faith. In connection with Christianity, this means that the dogmas have come to be regarded as implausible and have thus been abandoned. Hegel's goal is to try to restore these dogmas and with this the content of religion. In order to establish this, we will need to spend some time examining the academic landscape of the Enlightenment and the ideas of some of its key figures. Hegel's analysis of the Enlightenment from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is well known,⁶⁷ but it is little recognized that this same issue is central to his agenda in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, where his analyses in fact build on and develop his previous account from the *Phenomenology*.

Second, I wish to show that a part of Hegel's project is to correct what he regards as the mistaken form of religious belief in his day. While the Enlightenment has undermined the key dogmas of Christianity, *the content*, the Romantics have made matters even worse by reducing *the form* of religious faith

⁶⁷ Hegel, 'The Enlightenment,' *PhS*, pp. 328–55; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 414–48.

to mere feeling. In the absence of content, there is a shift from that 'what' of faith to the 'how' of faith. The idea then arises that the main thing is that one believes in the strength of one's own inwardness, but the nature of what precisely it is that is believed falls away. For Hegel, this leads to relativism and is a poor solution to the problem of the lack of content. In order to appreciate Hegel's position, we will need to study some of the key thinkers from the Romantic movement. Hegel issued a criticism of Romanticism under different rubrics such as 'the law of the heart', 'the beautiful soul', 'virtue and the way of the world', and 'the spiritual animal kingdom' from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁶⁸ But it is usually thought that these analyses are primarily concerned with Hegel's criticism of the Romantics' conceptions of ethics. It is little recognized that this constellation of issues is also absolutely central for Hegel's general programme in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

Third, I wish to argue that Hegel's historical account of religion does not end with the birth of Christianity as appears to be the case in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. A look at his other lectures reveals that he also has interesting things to say about religions such as Islam and Deism that appeared after Christianity. This topic has not received the attention it deserves in the secondary literature. The development of these later religions posed serious problems for Hegel's teleological understanding of the development of the world religions, and for this reason he was keen to have his official narrative about the development of the world religions end with Christianity as the final, true religion. But, as I wish to show, his analyses of these later religions are also insightful for an understanding of his view of Christianity and perhaps even valuable for discussions in religious studies today. Also relevant in this context is Hegel's account of the Protestant Reformation. From this it is clear that he acknowledges that Christianity is not static but rather continues to develop over time in step with the social and historical developments of the age.

Fourth, the approach presented here casts new light on the old controversies from 1830s and 1840s about the proper interpretation of Hegel's philosophy of religion in general. This was the period when the schools of right and left Hegelianism were formed. Hegel's students argued about whether his views could really be seen as a support for orthodox Christianity. This involved a series of debates on a number of specific issues: whether he had a theory of immortality, whether he supported the idea of a personal God, whether he believed in the divinity of Christ, etc. By seeing Hegel's treatment of Christianity not as a single analysis on its own but rather in response to the key issues coming from the

⁶⁸ See the chapters 'The Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness through its own Activity' and 'Individuality which Takes Itself to be Real in and for Itself' from the 'Reason' Chapter (*PhS*, pp. 211–62; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 271–334) and 'Spirit that Is Certain of Itself. Morality' from the 'Spirit' Chapter (*PhS*, pp. 364–409; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 459–516).

Enlightenment and Romanticism, one is able to see these old debates from a new perspective and indeed begin to resolve them.

Finally, I wish to demonstrate that the basic frame of many of the key issues concerning religion that are discussed today come from Hegel's time. The basic dispositions and intuitions of the leading figures of the Enlightenment and Romanticism are still alive and well. The present work tries to show that Hegel's response to these issues in his own time is thus not simply an archaic exercise that can be quickly dismissed. Instead, a study of his philosophy of religion can afford us insight into discussions in our current academic and cultural context.

The Enlightenment's Criticism of Religion: Theology

The motivation and agenda of Hegel's philosophy of religion developed in reaction to the religious situation that he found himself in at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This situation was determined by three major intellectual trends that took hold in Europe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Orientalism. Each of these historical movements had a major impact on the way people thought about religion. Hegel had an intimate knowledge of these movements and was personally acquainted with some of their principal leaders. In the present chapter and the next a sketch will be provided of the main issues stemming from the Enlightenment to which Hegel was reacting. In Chapter 3, this historical overview will be continued with a brief account of the main figures from the Romantic movement that Hegel polemicized against. Hegel was highly critical of both of these movements, which, he believed, undermined religion in general and Christianity specifically. One movement that was in some ways related to Romanticism was Orientalism. This new interest in Asian and Near Eastern culture and religion shaped Hegel's thinking in a positive and constructive manner. I forgo an account of Hegel's reaction to this movement since I have treated it in a previous work.¹

Hegel critically discusses the Enlightenment and many of its main figures in a number of different places in his corpus. He engages in an early polemic with the Enlightenment in 'The Tübingen Essay' from the *Early Theological Writings*.² He touches on it briefly in the Introduction to his article 'Faith and Knowledge'.³ Perhaps his single most famous account is the section dedicated to it in the 'Spirit' chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁴ In this analysis he speaks of the

¹ Jon Stewart, *Hegel's Interpretation of the Religions of the World: The Logic of the Gods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018.

² Hegel, 'The Tübingen Essay,' in *TE*, pp. 30–58; *TJ*, pp. 3–29.

³ Hegel, *Faith & Knowledge*, pp. 55–66; *Jub.*, vol. 1, pp. 279–93. For Hegel's understanding and criticism of the Enlightenment in general, see Lewis P. Hinchman, *Hegel's Critique of the Enlightenment*, Tampa and Gainesville: University Presses of Florida 1984, especially pp. 122–41. This work, however, is primarily concerned with political philosophy and does not focus in detail on the religious dimension of the Enlightenment. It does not explore Hegel's criticisms of the Enlightenment in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* but rather is mostly focused on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. See also Kristján G. Arngrímsson, 'Hegel's Dialogue with the Enlightenment,' *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2000, pp. 657–68.

⁴ See the section 'Self-Alienated Spirit: Culture' (*PhS*, pp. 294–363; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 372–459).

movement in very general terms, and identifying his concrete targets is not always easy. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* he also dedicates a section to the German Enlightenment in addition to treating a number of individual figures associated with the movement in France and Britain.⁵ There is a section dedicated to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.⁶ Finally, Hegel polemically touches on the Enlightenment in his review of the collected writings of Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88).⁷ While there is no specific chapter or section dedicated to the Enlightenment in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he does refer to it frequently in a polemical manner. There can be no doubt that throughout his life Hegel was highly engaged with Enlightenment thinking in many different spheres. He was born into the world of the Enlightenment, and it dominated his education and early intellectual life. It also crucially shaped his critical agenda in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, and so it is with the Enlightenment that we must begin our investigation.

1.1 The Crisis with the Emergence of the Sciences

With the rise of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new chapter began in the history of the relation of philosophy to religion.⁸ Through much of the Middle Ages, the doctrines and dogmas of the Christian religion were regarded collectively as a field of scholarly study alongside the sciences; theology was one of the traditional faculties together with medicine,

⁵ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 360–408; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 485–534.

⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 438–57; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 548–69.

⁷ Hegel, 'Hamanns Schriften. Herausgegeben von Friedrich Roth. VII Th. Berlin, bei Reimer 1821–1825,' *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, 1828, Erster Artikel (October), vol. II, nos 77–8, pp. 620–4, nos 79–80, pp. 625–40; Zweiter Artikel (December), vol. II, nos 107–8, pp. 859–64, nos 109–10, pp. 865–80, nos 111–12, pp. 881–96, nos 113–14, pp. 897–900. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, vols 16–17 (1834–35) in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 17, pp. 38–110. In *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 203–75. (In English in *Hegel on Hamann*, trans. by Lise Marie Anderson, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2008, pp. 1–53.)

⁸ For useful works on the role of religion in the Enlightenment, see Karl Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Brian Cozens and John Bowden, London: SCM Press 2001, pp. 1–369. Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology*, ed. by Carl Braaten, London: SCM Press 1967, pp. 1–114. James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 1997. Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1968. Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Régime and the French Revolution*, trans. by Stuart Gilbert, Garden City: Doubleday 1955, pp. 148–57. E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789–1848*, New York: New American Library 1962, pp. 258–76. S. J. Barnett, *The Enlightenment and Religion: The Myths of Modernity*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 2003. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Rise of Modern Paganism*, London: Norton 1995 (1966). Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Science of Freedom*, London: Wildwood House 1973 (1969). Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, trans. by Fritz C. A. Koelln and James P. Pettegrove, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1951.

law, etc.⁹ For Thomas Aquinas, reason was not regarded as a threat to religion but rather as a tool for it. He attempted to reconcile Christianity with the science of the day in the form of Aristotle's philosophy. There was, for him, no fundamental difference between secular and religious knowing. Christianity was thus regarded as one form of knowing on a continuous spectrum along with all the other disciplines. With the expansion of the natural sciences in the Renaissance a split began to emerge, which became acute in the Enlightenment. Now instead of being a legitimate form of knowing and an object of scholarly investigation, religion was dismissed as superstition and its representatives openly mocked as backwards, benighted, corrupt, hypocritical, and bigoted. The Enlightenment, with its grand celebration of the power of human reason to attain the truth on its own, caused a great crisis in religion by attacking it on a number of different fronts with a set of new tools. Given the criteria for the scientific determination of truth, the key doctrines of Christianity seemed to be indefensible and to continue to espouse them, irrational. Educated religious believers were thus put on the defensive and sought different forms of argumentation in order to defend their beliefs.

From the outset of the Renaissance and through the Enlightenment, the empirical sciences continued to grow and gradually became the model par excellence for human knowledge. The empirical dimension of scientific study was highly appealing to many people who felt that progress had been impeded through the stubborn insistence on traditional views and conceptions that were independent of any actual empirical verification.¹⁰ Galileo's observations of the moons in orbit around Jupiter raised serious questions about the long-held geocentric view of the universe. The Church favoured the idea of the earth occupying a special privileged place in the universe, but this was difficult to square with the observation that there were other heavenly bodies in orbit, not around the earth, but around another planet. When Anton Van Leeuwenhoek (1632–1723) developed and perfected the microscope, a new realm of empirical phenomena opened up that called into question a number of traditionally held views. For the first time bacteria, sperm cells, and blood cells were seen by the human eye, and this new empirical knowledge caused scientists to rethink their theories. While Leeuwenhoek himself believed that his discovery of microscopic phenomena provided a better appreciation for God's creation, it in fact raised methodological issues that proved difficult for religion to solve.

⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 154; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 65: 'We can see the same linkage between theology and philosophy in the Middle Ages, too. Scholastic philosophy is identical with theology; theology is philosophy, and philosophy is theology. So far were they from believing that thinking, conceptual knowing, might be injurious to theology that it was regarded as necessary, as essential to theology itself. These great men—Anselm, Abelard, etc. built up theology out of philosophy.'

¹⁰ One can mention here the empiricism of Diderot in works like *Lettre sur les aveugles à l'usage de ceux qui voient* (1749), *Pensées sur l'interprétation de la nature* (1751), *Le rêve de D'Alembert* (1769), and *Principes philosophiques sur la matière et le mouvement* (1770).

The cliché about the Enlightenment is that it focused exclusively on human reason, but this bald statement is in need of further explanation. The key question is what is really meant by 'reason' here. It can mean reason in the sense employed by rationalism, that is, truth derived from the natural light of the human mind. But this is only a part of the story. In fact, a closer look reveals that reason in the Enlightenment was closely associated with empirical knowledge, which is generally set in direct opposition to classical rationalism. According to the new view of the age, the mind could dream up whatever great ideas it wished, but it was the eye and the senses which were the real bar of judgement that could be used to test the truth and value of these ideas. Theories could be proven false based on empirical observation. Experiment, verification, and the possibility of falsification thus became the new watchwords of the modern scientific method. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, scientists radically sharpened and improved their techniques of observation and experimentation, making major advancements in fields such as botany, zoology, anatomy, and biology.

With the rapid development of the empirical sciences and the new methodology, religion suddenly appeared to be based on a dubious foundation. Many scholars from this period followed Descartes by insisting on a methodological principle of systematic doubt that rejected every idea or theory that had not been demonstrated to be true by means of empirical and sensory observation and verification. This presented a problem for Christianity since none of its key doctrines was based on things that were empirically verifiable. The virgin birth of Christ, the Ascension, and the resurrection of the souls were ideas that hardly lent themselves to empirical testing. At a purely intuitive level they seemed to fly in the face of what experience teaches about the nature of birth and death. Since the key doctrines could not be demonstrated by means of empirical science, the new mindset dictated that they simply be discarded as vestiges of an older superstitious time.

While the Enlightenment is often characterized as anti-religious, there was actually only a small minority who simply wanted to jettison religion wholesale. Instead, for the most part, even the radical Enlightenment thinkers wanted to preserve some very basic conception of God and immortality. But the question was how to reconcile this with Enlightenment reason and empiricism. The strategy adopted from the very beginning was to pick and choose which doctrines could be plausibly defended; then once these had been identified, they were ceremoniously deemed to be the true *essence* of religion or Christianity, while the rest could safely be allowed to fall away without any real harm being done thereby. Thus an attempt was made to preserve the whole by abandoning specific, presumably insubstantial parts that were particularly vulnerable to attack. But the problem was where exactly to draw the line: which and how many doctrines should be abandoned? If one did not go far enough and give up enough doctrines, then one was continually open to the criticisms of science and appeared to place oneself in the camp of the superstitious defenders of an antiquated tradition. But if

one went too far and gave up too much, then one risked not ending up with anything with meaningful religious content and having a conception of Christianity that was rather tenuous and subsequently counterintuitive since one was obliged to abandon key doctrines which traditionally were constitutive for Christian faith. In short, one would have thrown out exactly the doctrines that one originally wished to preserve. For example, can one still talk about Christianity once one has abandoned the miracles or the divinity of Christ?

Hegel addresses himself to the general attack on religion mounted by the Enlightenment and the sciences in his own day.¹¹ To his mind, the so-called *philosophes*, who ostensibly wished to defend religion, were clearly guilty of the latter error—they had gone too far and reduced religion to a meaningless empty shell. They had done so since, Hegel believed, they were methodologically confused. They saw and appreciated the advances of science and thus agreed with the attacks of the advocates of science on religion. They believed that the only way to defend religion was by means of science, in other words, by showing that some aspects of religion were not incompatible with scientific knowing. But this approach in a sense capitulated from the outset and condemned the cause of religion to be on the defensive.

According to the view of the critics, there was something fundamentally irrational in religion, and it was for this reason that the philosophers of the period felt obliged to abandon so many of the traditional dogmas. Hegel's great endeavour is, among other things, to attempt to demonstrate the truth and rationality of religion in the face of this criticism. But the Enlightenment's criticism has many different shades and nuances of meaning and cannot simply be characterized by the charge of irrationalism without further explanation. Indeed, this criticism of religion took many forms in the different fields. In order to set the stage for Hegel's defence of religion, we will need to take a look at the situation that he was facing in the general spheres of theology, philosophy of religion, and what we today call religious studies. While Hegel does not always cite the objects of his polemics directly, he was clearly familiar with the authors and intellectual trends that will be outlined in this chapter. Once the targets of his criticism have been identified, then his own intuitions, argumentative strategy, and ultimate position will emerge more clearly.

1.2 Deism

The thinkers of the Enlightenment wanted merely to hold firm to what they regarded as rational, while purging religion of what they took to be superstitious,

¹¹ For Hegel's view of Enlightenment empiricism, see Hinchman, *Hegel's Critique of the Enlightenment*, pp. 75–93.

childish views without foundation. After rejecting Christianity, the *philosophes* ended up with Deism, that is, a simple, very general belief in a Supreme Being.¹² According to this view, there is a God, but one very distant from human affairs. The Supreme Being had created the world with the rational laws of nature, which were accessible to the rational human mind. In this regard, the Enlightenment thinkers could claim that their conception of the divine was empirically verifiable; when one observes nature, one sees structures, regularities, and lawlike events. It thus seemed a natural assumption that there must have been some greater intelligence that brought this to be.¹³ But beyond this conception of God as a creator or greater intelligence, nothing more is testified by the empirical data. This Supreme Being does not interfere in the world with miracles or revelations. All talk of this kind of thing was regarded as simple nonsense. The watchmaker analogy seemed persuasive. God simply created the universe like a watchmaker creates a watch. But once the process of creation is complete, there is nothing left to do, and the universe, like the watch, can run on its own with no need of further intervention. The deists thus attempted to salvage a part of religion that they considered the most important but at the cost of dismissing the rest as irrational.

Hegel observed this tendency and was quick to polemicize against it. He felt that the empiricists had entirely missed the point of religion and were ascribing to it views that it never held. In short, by asking religion to live up to the standards of the Enlightenment, science was begging the question. For Hegel, the advocates of the Enlightenment had a shallow understanding of religion and an inflated view of the importance and usefulness of their celebrated scientific method. He felt that the deist conception of the divine was problematic since if this was all that was left of religion, then one might as well simply go ahead and admit that it has been abandoned altogether. Such a conception of the divine could never satisfy the deep human need for consolation and reconciliation.

With a focus on the empirical sciences, the followers of the Enlightenment insisted that only what can be perceived, measured, and quantified in a scientific manner is true. Since God falls outside the scope of the empirical, He is, as it were, banned to an unknown 'beyond':

To be sure, the finite and the determinate, which this cognition has drawn within its sphere, direct it to something otherworldly, but it grasps this object itself in a finite manner as an abstract supreme being utterly lacking all character. The Enlightenment—in other words, the consummation of finite cognition just depicted—purports to set God exceedingly high in calling God the infinite for which all predicates are inappropriate and unjustified anthropomorphisms. But

¹² See Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant*, pp. 99–123.

¹³ Here one can readily recognize a modern version of Aquinas' teleological argument or argument from design.

when it grasped God as the supreme being, it in actuality made God hollow, empty, and impoverished.¹⁴

By making the Supreme Being transcendent and abstract, the deists believed that they had arrived at a rational conception of the divine that overcame the previous superstitious views. However, Hegel points out, this notion of the divine is ultimately devoid of any meaningful content. When God is conceived as an abstract deity who floats above all specific religious denominations, nothing is left of the content of the individual religions. The deists tried to show that their religion was actually already implicit in the religions of the world by demonstrating that a conception of the Supreme Being was to be found under different names in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Indeed, they even tried to make the same claim with Greek and Roman polytheism, claiming Zeus and Jupiter were the forerunners of their deity.¹⁵ This insight, they believed, would lead to ecumenical harmony when the followers of the different world religions realized that they were in fact all worshipping the same God in the end. For Hegel, this was problematic since the goal was to discern the differences in the various world religions by means of their content. Deism, by contrast, eliminated this content and dismissed the views of traditional religion as superstition.

Hegel believes that what lies behind this view is an impoverished empiricism. In philosophical thinking what is at issue is not collecting empirical information about *contingent* things in the world but rather grasping the *necessary* speculative knowledge about the concepts that determine the world. To make God the object of empirical observation is to reduce the divine to contingency. It is absurd, he thinks, to try to see God through the lens of a telescope or a microscope. God is not a physical entity in this manner, but this is the view that the Enlightenment thinkers ascribe to religion since it is the only one that the follower of empiricism knows and accepts. But this is, of course, not what religion asserts. It never claimed that the divine was something that could be analysed empirically. This is simply a case of Enlightenment reason transferring its own methodology and criteria onto religion. Instead, God is absolute and infinite. For the religious believer, God is not limited to a specific time or space but is instead omnipresent and eternal. This religious intuition can be best defended, Hegel believes, with a philosophical and not a crude empirical approach.

¹⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 124, note 31; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 40n.

¹⁵ See Voltaire [L'Abbé Bazin], *La Philosophie de l'histoire*, Geneva: aux dépens de l'auteur 1765, pp. 356–7. English translation: *The Philosophy of History, or A Philosophical and Historical Dissertation*, trans. by Henry Wood Gandell, London: Thomas North 1829, p. 305: 'It is also an indisputable fact that the Romans, like the Greeks, worshipped a God Supreme. Their Jupiter was the only one who was regarded as the god of thunder, and whom they designated as the infinitely great and good God—*Deus optimus maximus*. Thus from Italy, to India and China, we find the worship of a Supreme God; and toleration granted by all the known nations of the earth.'

Hegel believes that those religious writers who try to meet the criticisms of science on its own terms have given away the game from the very start. When they attempt to justify key religious doctrines based on scientific grounds, they play right into the hands of the Enlightenment critics, who are quick to criticize them for bad science. Moreover, these attempts invariably end up distorting the true nature of the divine and going along with the deist conception of an abstract, transcendent deity. For Hegel, this is a mistaken strategy in response to the religious crisis.¹⁶

He believes that both the Enlightenment view and the so-called theology of reason reach a conception of an empty, indeterminate, unknown God. By contrast, his own speculative philosophy of religion offers a determinate content and knowledge of the divine. For thinking reason:

God is therefore not the void but spirit, and this determination of spirit does not remain for it merely a word or a superficial determination; instead the nature of spirit unfolds for it in that it cognizes God essentially as triune. God is thus grasped in the way in which he makes himself into his own object, and then in the way in which the object in its differentiation remains identical with God, and God himself loves himself in it. Without this determination of the Trinity, God would not be spirit and spirit would be an empty word.¹⁷

Hegel's strategy is a complex one. On the one hand, he wishes to meet the demands of rigorous science by demonstrating the necessity of key religious truths (such as the Trinity). His repeated use of the term 'Spirit' is intended to refer to this. Even though this is not an empirical approach, it should be acceptable to the empiricists in the same way that logic or mathematics are since they too establish truths independent of any specific reference to the empirical. On the other hand, he tries to fulfil the wishes and vindicate the feelings of religious believers by demonstrating that the views that they hold most dear can in fact be given a firm foundation beyond simply their immediate intuitions. Most importantly, he believes that the speculative triad, which is the philosophical analogue to the Christian Trinity, can provide the concept of the divine with a meaningful content that is lacking in Deism. Since the speculative triad is a dynamic movement, it changes and develops, thus producing a content that can be understood and grasped by the human mind. This is, for Hegel, far superior to the view that simply deems God to be an unknown, transcendent entity about which nothing further can be said.

¹⁶ See Hegel, *PhS*, pp. 329–49; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 415–41.

¹⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 124–5, note 31; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 40n. See also *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 164; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 73–4. *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 178; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 86–7.

Hegel takes one of the main negative aspects of the Enlightenment to be its dismissal of the traditional Christian dogmas. He captures this with a play on words, saying that the '*Aufklärung*—or the *Ausklärung*—made short work of' dogmas.¹⁸ The German word for the Enlightenment is *Aufklärung*, which Hegel, by changing a single letter, turns into *Ausklärung*, which means an elimination or getting rid of something. Enlightenment reason finds the dogmas to be implausible and indefensible, and so it gets rid of them. The result is, however, an empty abstraction that is meaningless from a religious point of view and dangerous from a political one.

1.3 Voltaire: A Rational Understanding of Religion

In his work *God and Human Beings* from 1769,¹⁹ Voltaire, in the spirit of the Enlightenment, attempts to address the question of religion by means of reason. His approach can be seen in many ways as representative of some of the basic intuitions of the period. Posing as an Englishman under the pseudonym Doctor Obern, Voltaire provides a detailed account of the history of the world religions. At the end of the work, he ultimately gives his own view of what religion should look like, calling for its reform but not its abolition. However, the reform that he proposes ends up inadvertently eliminating key features of Christianity and indeed of religion in general. Thus while his tone and stated goal are different from the freethinkers he wishes to criticize, the result of his study is much the same. By pretending to be an Englishman, he is able to enter into a critical discussion with the English and Irish freethinkers of the age such as Lord Bolingbroke (1678–1751), Anthony Collins (1676–1729), John Toland (1670–1722), and Thomas Woolston (1670–1731).²⁰ Although he is often characterized as a freethinker himself, Voltaire clearly believes that many of these figures have gone too far and have allowed their animosity towards religion to cloud their reason.

Hegel owned a number of books by Voltaire, primarily the historical works.²¹ He refers to the French philosopher in his 'Aphorisms from the Wastebook'²² and

¹⁸ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 457; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 588.

¹⁹ Voltaire [Docteur Obern], *Dieu et les hommes, oeuvre théologique, mais raisonnable*, par le Docteur Obern, traduit par Jacques Aimon, Berlin: Christian de Vos 1769. (English translation: *God and Human Beings*, trans. by Michael Shreve, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books 2010.)

²⁰ Voltaire was presumably familiar with the works of these men during the years of his exile in Britain from 1726 to 1729.

²¹ As testified by the protocol of his personal library that was made after his death, Hegel owned the following works by Voltaire: *La Henriade, Poème*, Paris: Didot 1815 (*Hegel's Library*, 929); *Histoire de l'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*, vols 1–2, Paris: Didot 1815 (*Hegel's Library*, 1267–8); *Histoire de Charles XII*, Paris: Didot 1817 (*Hegel's Library*, 1268); *Siècle de Louis XIV et de Louis XV*, vols 1–5, Paris: Didot 1803 (*Hegel's Library*, 1269–74).

²² Hegel, 'Aphorisms from the Wastebook,' *MW*, p. 246; *Dokumente*, p. 357.

in the essay 'Faith and Knowledge', both from the Jena period.²³ Voltaire is also mentioned in the *Encyclopedia*.²⁴ Hegel's student Victor Cousin (1792–1867) recounts discussing a number of authors with him including Voltaire.²⁵ Hegel's book review of Hamann's writings also includes several references to the French thinker.²⁶ A variety of Voltaire's views and works are also discussed in the *Lectures on Aesthetics*,²⁷ *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*,²⁸ and *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.²⁹ It is not known if Hegel knew *God and Human Beings* specifically; however, the main tendencies that it represents seem to be the kind of thing that he is responding to in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

Voltaire begins his account of Jesus with the claim that one should investigate the historical sources about him with critical reason. Such an approach is, to his mind, completely obvious: 'Only a fanatic or stupid rogue could say that you should never examine the story of Jesus with the lights of reason. With what will you judge a book, whatever it may be? Is it with folly?'³⁰ In matters of religion, one should not accept things on the basis of mere authority, be that of tradition, the church or a priest. Such claims of authority invariably contain certain absurd elements which cannot be accepted. Rather, one must examine the matter for oneself with the use of one's own critical faculty. Voltaire thus turns to Jesus and the gospels in order to put them to the test of reason. One of the first things that becomes obvious in this examination is that reason obliges him to reject miracles and prophecies.³¹ Such things are obvious absurdities, he argues, that were inserted into the sacred texts by later writers interested in validating or discrediting Christ, either by providing a proof for his divinity or by ascribing to him qualities of a dubious magician or wizard. But these things obviously have no basis in actuality. Voltaire claims that the method of rational examination requires that such stories be rejected and thus omitted from the account of Jesus.

²³ Hegel, *Faith & Knowledge*, p. 178; *Jub.*, vol. 1, pp. 419–20.

²⁴ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, § 394, Addition, p. 49; *Jub.*, vol. 10, p. 84. *Phil. of Nature*, § 270, Addition, p. 74; *Jub.*, vol. 9, p. 136. *Phil. of Nature*, § 339, Addition 2, p. 281; *Jub.*, vol. 9, p. 461.

²⁵ See Hegel in *Berichten seiner Zeitgenossen*, ed. by Günther Nicolin, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1970, p. 327; see also pp. 234–5.

²⁶ Hegel, *Hamann*, pp. 5, 42; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 206, 258.

²⁷ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 235; *Jub.*, vol. 12, p. 318. *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 267; *Jub.*, vol. 12, pp. 359–60. *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 274; *Jub.*, vol. 12, p. 368. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1061; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 353. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1075; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 372. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1109; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 416. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1180; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 509. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1191; *Jub.*, vol. 14, pp. 522–3.

²⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 339; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 240.

²⁹ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 143; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 250. *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 340; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 465. *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 387; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 514. *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 399; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 525.

³⁰ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 103; *Dieu et les hommes*, pp. 151–2.

³¹ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 107; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 159: 'To judge only with reason, we must put aside every miracle, every divination.'

Voltaire further denies that Jesus ever claimed to be a God. Moreover, none of his immediate disciples ever ascribed divinity to him.³² Jesus was simply regarded as an especially moral and pious person who was favoured by God. Critical reason must thus also reject the notion of Christ's divinity as a later idea that was imposed long after the fact by parties with strong vested interests. Once the irrational elements have been removed from the historical sources, what is left is the picture of Jesus as a human being with an upstanding moral character, nothing more, nothing less.³³

Voltaire's somewhat surprising and shocking thesis is that Jesus himself never really intended to found a new religion. He and his followers were and remained Jews. Moreover, the religion of Christianity that arose later represents a great departure from everything that Jesus actually taught and stood for.³⁴ According to Voltaire, in the first centuries after the death of Christ, numerous Christian believers concocted different stories about him in order to legitimize the new religion. They attributed things to Jesus that neither he nor his immediate disciples ever claimed. The abovementioned ascription of divinity to Christ, for example, was only something that arose later during the period of so-called 'pious frauds':

For three centuries nothing was easier for Christians than to secretly multiply their gospels until they had fifty-four of them. It is even surprising that there were not more of them. In return, I admit that they were constantly busy with composing fables, imaging false prophesies, false commandments, false adventures, falsifying ancient books, fabricating martyrs and miracles. They call them "pious frauds."³⁵

As time passed, the fictional picture of Jesus and his teaching moved further and further away from its actual historical source. The result of this was a conception of Jesus that became ever more absurd and unworthy of the divine. Indeed, in one passage, Voltaire places a neutral observer in dialogue with the vested religious interests and has the observer claim that he wants to defend Jesus against the absurdities told about him by his purported religious defenders.³⁶ In this context

³² Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 116; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 177: 'But neither in the citations nor in the fragments nor in any of the gospels entirely preserved was the character of Jesus ever proclaimed except in his capacity as a just man upon whom God spread his greatest graces.'

³³ See Hegel's objection to this view: *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 156; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 67.

³⁴ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, pp. 111–12; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 169: 'I dare to put forth, along with the most educated and wisest of men, that Jesus never dreamt of founding this sect. Christianity, such as it was at the time of Constantine, was farther from Jesus than from Zoroaster or Brahma. Jesus became the pretext of our fanatical doctrines, of our persecutions, of our religious crimes, but he wasn't the author of them.'

³⁵ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 120; *Dieu et les hommes*, pp. 185–6.

³⁶ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, pp. 107–8; *Dieu et les hommes*, pp. 160–2: 'But as the Gospel tells us that Jesus had sent the devil into the bodies of these pigs, in a country that never had pigs, a man who is neither Christian nor Jewish can reasonably doubt this. He will say to the theologians, "Pardon me if in wanting to justify Jesus I am forced to refute your books ... I want to make this Jesus just and

he rejects, for example, the stories of the cleansing of the Temple,³⁷ the casting out of the demons,³⁸ the rendering infertile of the fig tree,³⁹ the turning of water into wine,⁴⁰ and the Temptation.⁴¹ These stories do no credit to the character or upstanding nature of Jesus. He can best be defended, it is argued, not by accepting every absurdity that is written about him or ascribed to him, but rather by rejecting these and keeping only the positive characteristics that are reasonable.

Voltaire claims that Jesus was a Jew who followed Jewish law but never preached dogma or doctrine as such.⁴² Since Christ did not talk much about actual doctrine himself, the different Christian groups were left to grapple with such things on their own.⁴³ Given the many ambiguities and murky points in the original sources, there was a natural need to try to bring clarity to the matter. But with the attempts to elucidate and determine the key issues there also came disputes and disagreements.⁴⁴ According to Voltaire, it was in the course of these disputes that the greatest absurdities began to arise. The Church Councils were called to resolve the key issues that were dividing the Christian communities,⁴⁵ such as the Trinity, the status of the divinity of Jesus and Mary, etc. For Voltaire, such attempts represent the height of absurdity. The Councils of learned scholars debated these issues and arrived at conclusions that they then agreed among themselves must be the true ones, even though the actual issues themselves were never even broached by Jesus. In this way the religion of Christianity arose with a string of dogmas and doctrines that had precious little to do with anything that Christ ever actually taught.

These doctrinal disputes proved to have a singularly negative effect on subsequent history since they repeatedly led to religious wars, persecutions, etc. Voltaire declares, 'This argumentative theology is at the same time the most absurd and the most abominable scourge that ever afflicted the earth.'⁴⁶ The woes caused by theological strife are portrayed in a brilliant satirical way in Voltaire's classic *Candide*. He also dwells on this in his historical works. Although Jesus himself led a moral life, Christians acting in his name used later conflicts about doctrine as an excuse to inflict harm on others.

wise. He wouldn't be either if everything you say were true: and these adventures cannot be true because they aren't appropriate for God or man. In order to appraise Jesus, allow me to cross out the passages of your Gospel that dishonor him. I'll defend Jesus against you.'

³⁷ Mark 11:15–19, 11:27–33, Matthew 21:12–17, 21:23–7, Luke 19:45–8, 20:1–8, John 2:13–16.

³⁸ Matthew 8:28–34. ³⁹ Mark 11:12–14. ⁴⁰ John 2:1–11.

⁴¹ Matthew 4:1–11, Mark 1:12–13, Luke 4:1–13.

⁴² Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 134; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 214: 'Properly speaking neither the Jews nor Jesus had any dogma.'

⁴³ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 135; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 216: 'Jesus spoke so little about dogma that every Christian society that arose after him had its own belief.'

⁴⁴ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 136; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 217: 'More than six hundred disputes, great and small, raised and maintained trouble in the Christian Church while all the other religions on the earth were at peace.'

⁴⁵ For example, the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, the three Councils of Ephesus in 431, 449, and 475 AD.

⁴⁶ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 150; *Dieu et les hommes*, pp. 243–4.

Voltaire's great plea at the end of the work is for people to put aside all the fine points of dogma that have proven historically so divisive. Instead, religion should focus on the moral aspect, that is, on leading a virtuous life like that of Jesus. Only when this is done will religion be a positive force that unites people: 'Religion surely consists in virtue and not in impertinent frivolities of theology. Morality comes from God; it is uniform everywhere. Theology comes from men; it is different and ridiculous everywhere.'⁴⁷ Voltaire claims that we can think of an abstract God as a divinity who punishes the wicked and rewards the just, and this will have a beneficial effect on human behaviour and morals, but we should not begin to introduce other elements of doctrine that will always be disputed.⁴⁸ He believes that if we conceive of God in this abstract manner, then we can avoid the problems of sectarianism.

All the sects can come together and worship a God of this kind and, indeed, all the religions as well: 'Let us worship the Supreme Being through Jesus, since it is established thus among us . . . What does it matter if we render our homage to the Supreme Being through Confucius, Marcus Aurelius, Jesus, or some other, provided that we are just?'⁴⁹ Since there is only one true, just morality, all moral teachers in history have shared this same view; therefore, it is a matter of indifference which of them one wants to take as one's model. The simpler and more abstract conception of God can have the positive effect of bringing people together, which is just the opposite of what happens when people begin to talk about dogma: 'The adoration of a God who punishes and rewards unites all men; the detestable and contemptible argumentative theology divides them.'⁵⁰

Ultimately Voltaire's plea is to reform the religious practice of the day so that it is more worthy both of God and of human beings.⁵¹ Despite his somewhat harsh language in the body of the work, his call at the end is not for the destruction or elimination of religion but merely for its reform: 'Yes, we want a religion, but a simple one, wise, august, less unworthy of God and made more for us; in a word, we want to serve "God and human beings".'⁵² In the end, Voltaire advocates a belief in God, albeit a rather special kind of God, and claims to have no objection to the continuation of the priesthood, church services, and prayer, all in modified form. For example, religious service should be for exhortations to virtue and not the preaching of dogma.⁵³

⁴⁷ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 149; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 243.

⁴⁸ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 127; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 202: 'It is useful that men believe God is a rewarder and revenger. This idea encourages honesty and is not shocking to common sense.'

⁴⁹ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 149; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 243.

⁵⁰ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 150; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 243.

⁵¹ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 153; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 249: 'Far from abolishing public worship, we want to make it purer and less unworthy of the Supreme Being.'

⁵² Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 155; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 254.

⁵³ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 155; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 253.

With attempts of this sort to undermine the causes of religious conflict, Voltaire along with many of the other great figures of the Enlightenment in effect waged a critical campaign against dogma. Voltaire's claim that the dogmas of Christianity were far removed from the actual teachings of Jesus was shocking at the time. For Hegel, this kind of view was deeply problematic. Jesus lived and taught, and these are simply empirical facts (based on the extant sources), but they do not mean anything on their own. It is only when the human mind goes to work on these facts that certain ideas emerge, as they must. Thus, for Hegel, there is no absurdity in the later attempts to determine Christian doctrine. These doctrines were simply the collective human mind's attempt to conceptualize the phenomena of Christ and his teachings. This was a necessary development. For Christ's teachings to be lasting, they must be made universal and eternal by means of thought. The human mind is never content simply to leave things with the empirical. There is always an attempt to penetrate further and to reach an understanding, to find a *logos* in the phenomena. Thus it is absurd to claim that there is a radical split between the original teaching of Christ and the dogma of the Christian Church. One can just as well say that there is a radical split between the empirical movements of the planets and Kepler's laws. In a sense it is true that there is a difference: the one is empirical and the other conceptual. But in another sense, they coincide since the one is a reflection of the other in thought.⁵⁴

Moreover, by calling for a reduction of dogma and by making the divine a mere abstraction, the Enlightenment risks opening the door for fanaticism. If the conception of God is simply of one who rewards and punishes, the question still remains open about exactly what kinds of action are worthy of reward or punishment. Voltaire repeatedly returns to the idea that religion should be about morals, ethics, and virtue and that this is something universal, but he never bothers to explain what this amounts to. The problem with his view can be clearly seen in his claim that the morality of all the great moral teachers in history is ultimately one and the same: 'Confucius, Marcus Aurelius, [and] Jesus' all purportedly had the same views of ethics and morals.⁵⁵ There are very different principles and ideas that can be used to determine ethics. To say that all moral individuals in history had the same ethics and to leave it at that with no further explanation is to leave ethics entirely undetermined. What is a moral act? When this remains at the level of abstraction, one risks opening the door for fanatics to deem their own fanatical action moral and virtuous. Instead of Voltaire's strategy

⁵⁴ See Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 228; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 159: 'it is well known that Kepler discovered the laws of the heavens. They are valid for us in a twofold fashion; they are the universal. The discovery began from the observation of single cases; certain movements were referred back to laws, but these were still only single cases . . . This is, to be sure, how we have initially become aware of the matter; it has come within the ken of our representative capacity. But the interest of spirit is that such a law be true in and for itself; the concern is whether it is in conformity with reason, i.e., that reason finds its counterpart in the law.'

⁵⁵ Voltaire, *God and Human Beings*, p. 149; *Dieu et les hommes*, p. 243.

being an effective antidote to religious fanaticism, its abstraction would simply foster and cultivate it. This is, according to Hegel, precisely what happened during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution, when the abstract was what dominated. When God is conceived as something transcendent and radically different from the world, the mundane sphere is regarded as having no value. Thus anything in it that one finds objectionable can be destroyed. Hegel explains: 'This freedom now turns against merely spiritless externality and servitude, for the latter is utterly opposed to the concepts of reconciliation and liberation. Thus thinking enters in, defying and destroying externality in whatever form it appears. This is the negative and formal mode of acting which, in its concrete shape, has been called the *Enlightenment*.'⁵⁶ This is an arbitrary and destructive kind of freedom that arose in the course of the French Revolution. In the absence of any clear-cut perfect political system that could be agreed upon by all parties, any existing law or institution could be attacked for being imperfect. Thus, nothing mundane is able to withstand this destructive disposition. For Hegel, the key is concrete content, and this is what dogma supplies. The movement in the modern age away from it to the realm of abstraction is, to his mind, a misunderstanding that leads to disastrous consequences.

1.4 Reimarus: The Crisis of Biblical Studies

The Enlightenment spirit also found its way into the field of biblical studies. During Hegel's time the field of biblical criticism was in its infancy, and scholars were only beginning to determine the different strands of the authorship of the canonical texts. Just as critical reason could be applied to religious dogmas, so also it could be applied to the written word. No longer was the Bible something that could be accepted as true on the basis of authority alone. Now it had to be examined closely using the critical faculty of the human mind; this alone, it was thought, was the sole worthy judge of the truth or falsity of the events portrayed in the scriptures. Human reason could determine what was contradictory and what was consistent.⁵⁷ The spirit of the day could not accept, for example, the idea of divine intervention in natural events, and so the goal was to try to find natural explanations for the miracles ascribed to Jesus in the New Testament. Likewise empiricism could not accept the idea of the Incarnation and the divinity of Jesus, and so biblical scholars of this persuasion closely examined precisely what Jesus

⁵⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 343; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 265.

⁵⁷ See *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger. Noch ein Fragment des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungeannten*, ed. by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Braunschweig: [no publisher] 1778, [Part] II, § 49, p. 219. (English translation: Reimarus, *Fragments*, ed. by Charles H. Talbert, trans. by Ralph S. Fraser, London: Fortress Press 1971, p. 234): 'The unerring signs of truth and falsehood are clear, distinct consistency and contradiction.'

said about himself and what was said about him later, hoping to demonstrate that the latter were only later fictions added to his teachings and the events of his life, which proved in the end to be all too mundane.

One of the major issues that exercised Old Testament scholars at the time was the question of whether Moses was in fact the author of the Pentateuch as had been traditionally thought. Interest in this issue went back to the seventeenth century when the philosophers Hobbes and Spinoza called this traditional belief into question by pointing out the contradictions involved in the assumption of the Mosaic authorship. Hobbes tried to demonstrate, based on the events portrayed in the texts, that although Moses might have authored certain of the narratives that concerned events about him, he must have belonged to a much earlier period than the one in which the Pentateuch as a whole was written.⁵⁸ Spinoza claimed that the Pentateuch and the other books of the Hebrew Bible up to 2 Kings were the work not of Moses but, in all probability, of Ezra.⁵⁹

In an attempt to refute this view, the French scholar Jean Astruc (1684–1766) argued that there had been a long tradition of oral and written transmission of materials prior to Moses, who drew on these sources when he put together the Book of Genesis in order to make a readable and continuous narrative.⁶⁰ Astruc observed that there were occasionally two different accounts of the same event such as the creation or the flood. He further noted that God was sometimes referred to as 'Elohim' and sometimes as 'Jehovah' (or 'Yahweh'). This led him to conclude that Moses was working with two different sources when he created the text. Instead of choosing the one and rejecting the other, Moses decided to include them both, even at the cost of some repetition of material. Astruc attempted to reconstruct the original source texts by isolating the passages that referred to 'Elohim' and then those that used the name 'Jehovah'; these passages could each be read on their own as independent narratives. Astruc thus established the idea of the authors 'E' (from the term 'Elohim') and 'J' (from the term 'Jehovah'). According to him, Moses should be given the credit as the one who collected the sources and compiled the text that we know as Genesis. While Astruc's defence of the Mosaic authorship was unsuccessful, his philological approach, which is said to have founded the field of biblical source criticism, won many adherents.

One of these was Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), who was professor of oriental languages at the University of Jena. In his *Einleitung ins Alte Testament*,⁶¹

⁵⁸ See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part III, Chapter 33.

⁵⁹ See Spinoza, *Tractatus theologico-politicus*, Chapter 8.

⁶⁰ Jean Astruc (published anonymously), *Conjectures sur les mémoires originaux dont il paroît que Moïse s'est servi pour composer le Livre de la Génèse. Avec des Remarques qui appuient ou qui éclaircissent ces Conjectures*, Brussels: Frick 1753.

⁶¹ Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Einleitung ins Alte Testament*, vols 1–3, Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich 1780–83.

he took the assumption of two separate authors and applied it to the entire Book of Genesis and the first two chapters of Exodus. He expanded Astruc's methodology by including other linguistic elements such as repeated key words or phrases, or consistency of literary style in order to distinguish the different source texts. Generally speaking, Eichhorn was interested in the Hebrew Bible not so much as a religious text but as an important source of history. He thus disregarded the supernatural elements that appeared in the biblical stories.

This approach was continued and further developed by Hegel's colleague in Berlin, the theologian, Wilhelm de Wette, who in his *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, established a third source, which would later come to be known as 'D,' referring to the author of the Book of Deuteronomy, which he claimed was written long after the other books of the Pentateuch, to which it ostensibly belongs.⁶² However, instead of there being a single source text, he claimed that this book was made up of a number of fragments. He thus supported the so-called fragmentary hypothesis, that is, the view that the Pentateuch is made up not of a few longer continuous *documents* but of a large number of shorter *fragments*.⁶³ Hegel and de Wette knew each other personally. De Wette, who had been a professor in Berlin since 1810, opposed Hegel's appointment and tried to support instead Hegel's rival Jakob Friedrich Fries for the job. In any case, works like those of Astruc, Eichhorn, and de Wette laid the groundwork for the so-called documentary hypothesis, which claims that the Pentateuch consists of four different *documents* or sources put together by later editors; this view was later fully developed by the Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) in the second half of the nineteenth century.

In addition to these discussions about the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, there had been, since Hegel's youth, a major controversy concerning the reliability and veracity of the biblical texts as history. Perhaps the most celebrated of these biblical scholars was Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768), whose provocative 'fragments' were published posthumously (between 1774 and 1778) by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who appeared as editor.⁶⁴ While living in Hamburg and working

⁶² Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, vols 1–2, Halle: Schimmelpfennig und Compagnie 1806–7. See also Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette, *Dissertatio critica-exegetica qua Deuteronomium a prioribus Pentateuchi libris diversum alius cuiusdam recentioris auctoris opus esse monstratur*, Jena 1805. See John Rogerson, *W. M. L. de Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1992. Thomas Albert Howard, 'W. M. L. de Wette: Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Biblical Criticism' in his *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M. L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, pp. 23–50. John Rogerson, 'W. M. L. de Wette,' in his *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1985, pp. 28–49.

⁶³ This view is often associated with the Scottish theologian Alexander Geddes (1737–1802). See Alexander Geddes, *Critical Remarks on the Hebrew Scriptures; Corresponding with a New Translation of the Bible*, vol. 1, *Remarks on the Pentateuch*, London: Davis, Wilks, and Taylor 1800.

⁶⁴ The 'fragments' were originally published as follows: 1) 'Von Duldung der Deisten: Fragment eines Ungenannten,' in *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur. Aus den Schätzen der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu*

at the theatre there, Lessing made the acquaintance of Reimarus' son and daughter. After Reimarus' death, his daughter, Elise Reimarus (1729–1814), gave a copy of the text to Lessing. It was an expansive monograph entitled *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*, which Reimarus had worked on over a very long period of time but did not dare to publish due to its provocative content. Fearing for the reputation of her deceased father, Elise Reimarus told Lessing that if he found a suitable forum for it, he could publish the text on the condition that he did not reveal the identity of her father as the author. When Lessing received a post as librarian in the Ducal Library in Wolfenbüttel in 1770, the opportunity presented itself. One of his jobs at the library was to publish new discoveries that he found among its holdings, and in this context he was freed from the usual obligation to submit the material intended for publication to the censors of the Principality of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel. He thus seized the opportunity to begin to publish some excerpts from Reimarus' text in 1774, claiming to have found the work in the library, and pretending to be ignorant of who the author was.⁶⁵

Reimarus' text was written in the Enlightenment spirit. Its goal was to apply the methodology of critical reason to an examination of the scriptures. His analysis reveals that certain key points in the Bible could not hold up to scholarly scrutiny and critical reason, or rather the ways in which certain central episodes of the Bible have been traditionally understood are gravely mistaken. Reimarus carefully goes through both the Old and the New Testament, pointing out what he takes to be inconsistencies and contradictions. Of particular interest with regard to the former is the third fragment, 'The Passage of the Israelites through the Red Sea'.⁶⁶ Here Reimarus explores the famous story from Exodus in which Moses leads the Jews, fleeing from the Egyptians, through the Red Sea, which miraculously parts at his command. Reimarus attempts to show the contradictions and absurdities in

Wolfenbüttel, vol. 3, ed. by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Braunschweig: Im Verlage der Buchhandlung des Fürstl. Waysenhauses 1774, pp. 195–226. 2) 'Ein Mehreres aus den Papieren des Ungenannten, die Offenbarung betreffend,' in *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur. Aus den Schätzen der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel*, vol. 4, ed. by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Braunschweig: Im Verlage der Buchhandlung des Fürstl. Waysenhauses 1777, pp. 261–88. 3) 'Zweytes Fragment. Unmöglichkeit einer Offenbarung, die alle Menschen auf eine gegründete Art glauben könnten,' in *ibid.*, pp. 288–65. 4) 'Drittes Fragment. Durchgang der Israeliten durchs rothe Meer,' in *ibid.*, pp. 366–83. 5) 'Viertes Fragment. Daß die Bücher A. T. nicht geschrieben worden, eine Religion zu offenbaren,' in *ibid.*, pp. 384–436. 6) 'Fünftes Fragment. Ueber die Auferstehungsgeschichte,' in *ibid.*, pp. 437–94. 7) *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger. Noch ein Fragment des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten*, ed. by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Braunschweig: [no publisher] 1778. For modern reprints, see Reimarus, *Apologie oder Schutzschrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes*, vols 1–2, ed. by Gerhard Alexander, Frankfurt am Main: Insel 1972. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Werke*, ed. by Herbert G. Göpfert et al., vols 1–8, Munich: Carl Hanser 1970–79, vol. 7, *Theologiekritische Schriften*, pp. 313–604.

⁶⁵ For accounts of the publication of this material, see William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 1, *From Deism to Tübingen*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1992, pp. 165–77. Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Hermeneutics*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 1974, pp. 113–16.

⁶⁶ [Reimarus], 'Drittes Fragment. Durchgang der Israeliten durchs rothe Meer,' pp. 366–83.

the text in order to undermine the received notion of the miracle involved. The biblical author tries to dazzle the reader with the idea of such an amazing thing happening, but he forgets to examine what such an event would actually look like in practice. Even if the waters of the Red Sea did part, would it really be possible for such a large group of people to pass over the wet seabed that was full of mud, debris, reeds, and floundering fish? Is it really conceivable that elderly people and women with babies and small children could, in great numbers, cross over such a surface? While the criticisms of the Hebrew Bible were serious, they were not regarded as particularly inflammatory on their own, and this part of the text, when published, met with no immediate resistance.

Emboldened, Lessing then turned to publishing parts of Reimarus' manuscript that concerned the New Testament and the real goal of Jesus' teachings and actions. Here Reimarus compares the different versions given by the four evangelists and the later writers. He claims that the former are more trustworthy historical witnesses and argues that the two different sets of texts must be kept apart. He explains his methodology as follows:

However, I find great cause to separate completely what the apostles say in their own writings from that which Jesus himself actually said and taught, for the apostles were themselves teachers and consequently present their own views; indeed, they never claim that Jesus himself said and taught in his lifetime all the things that they have written. On the other hand, the four evangelists represent themselves only as historians who have reported the most important things that Jesus said as well as did.⁶⁷

Reimarus thus focuses his analysis on the accounts of the evangelists. He has an acute eye for contradictions and inconsistencies both in the individual narratives and among the different ones.

Reimarus begins by claiming that when one looks at the text, it is clear that Jesus was a practicing Jew who never intended to desist from observing Jewish religious practice. Like Voltaire, Reimarus claims that Jesus never wanted to preach new doctrines or create a new religion. This, however, has been clouded by the fact that later doctrines have been ascribed to him that he never actually taught. Reimarus writes:

I cannot avoid revealing a common error of Christians who imagine because of the confusion of the teaching of the apostles with Jesus' teaching that the latter's purpose in his role of teacher was to reveal certain articles of faith and mysteries that were in part new and unknown, thus establishing a new system of religion,

⁶⁷ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 3, p. 64; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] I, § 3, pp. 7–8.

while on the other hand doing away with the Jewish religion in regard to its special customs, such as sacrifices, circumcision, purification, the Sabbath, and other Levitical ceremonies.⁶⁸

In fact, when one looks closely, the actual content of what Jesus said is rather minimal and not entirely clear. His main claims concern the coming of the messiah and the Kingdom of God, but no further elaboration is given of what these things are supposed to mean:

Thus Jesus says as little as John [the Baptist] about who or what Christ or Messiah is, or the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Heaven, or the gospel. They say simply: The Kingdom of Heaven or the gospel is near at hand. Jesus sends his disciples out precisely to preach the gospel, but he says nothing about what the Kingdom of Heaven is to consist of, what the promise was based on, or what the intention of the kingdom was; thus he simply refers to the common belief and hope in such matters.⁶⁹

Reimarus infers that since Jesus never felt the need to elaborate on these things, they must have already been immediately understood by his contemporary Jewish audience. In other words, he was not saying something new and wholly unexpected but rather was drawing on a long established tradition whose meaning was perfectly clear to all the Jews at the time. Reimarus explains:

Jesus then must have been aware that by such a plain announcement of the Kingdom of Heaven, he would only awaken the Jews to the hope of a worldly messiah; consequently, this must have been his object in so awakening them . . . Therefore he must have approved of the prevailing belief among the disciples and people, and it must have been his object to encourage and circulate it throughout Judea. This action on the part of Jesus cannot be justified.⁷⁰

The only logical conclusion is thus that not only was his message understood in this, at the time, natural way, but also that it was indeed his intention that it be so understood.

Reimarus claims that Jesus' original goal, which was immediately clear and obvious to the contemporary Jews, was to be recognized as the messiah who would free the Jews from the Roman yoke of oppression and the corrupt Jewish religious authorities, establishing a new glorious kingdom, not in heaven but in this world.

⁶⁸ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 7, p. 71; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] I, § 7, pp. 18–19.

⁶⁹ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 9, p. 74; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] I, § 9, p. 24.

⁷⁰ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 2, pp. 137–8; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] II, § 2, pp. 130–1.

In short, he was to stage a political revolution. This had long been prophesied and expected in the Jewish tradition, and thus the role was already prepared and in a sense waiting for him to come and play it. Reimarus reasons:

Thus when Jesus everywhere preached that the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven had drawn near and had others preach the same thing, the Jews were well aware of what he meant, that the Messiah would soon appear and that his kingdom would commence. For it was Israel's hope, waiting in longing since the days of oppression and captivity and according to the words of their prophets, that an anointed one or Messiah (a king) would come who would free them from all afflictions and establish a glorious kingdom among them.⁷¹

Reimarus notes that this is a far cry from the conception of Christ's mission that is understood by Christians:

First of all, it is evident that they [sc. Jesus' Jewish contemporaries] are still thinking in terms of a temporal redemption and of an earthly kingdom that they had hoped from Jesus up until that time. Israel or the Jewish people was to be redeemed, but not the human race ... Thus it was not a savior of the human race who would expiate the sins of the whole world through his Passion and death, but one who would redeem the people of Israel from temporal servitude.⁷²

Christ's goal was to start a mundane revolution. His intent was not to die for all humanity but to save the Jewish people from repression.

The idea was that the Jewish people had fallen on hard times since they had become sinful, corrupt, and impious. In the Hebrew Bible, God punishes them for these things repeatedly. Thus in order to escape this wretched condition, they needed to repent and to give up their sinful ways. Jesus preaches that this is required in order to prepare for the coming of the messiah and the new kingdom. The point is that this repentance is the means of achieving the desired end of political revolution. God was angry with the Jews for their corruption and sinfulness, and thus he inflicted his punishment by making them subject to a foreign people just as he had many times in the past, for example, when the Jews were the slaves of the Egyptians or Babylonians. But if the Jews were to repent, then God would recognize this and help them out of their downtrodden situation, and they would regain their former glory. He would assist the messiah in the establishment of a new temporal kingdom. Jesus thus sends out his followers to

⁷¹ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 29, p. 125; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] I, § 29, pp. 110–12.

⁷² Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 30, pp. 127–8; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] I, § 30, p. 115.

announce this message to the people in the towns: repent, the messiah is coming and the new kingdom is at hand.

According to Reimarus, Jesus then staged his entry into Jerusalem on a donkey in order to appear to fulfil the old prophecy that the king would appear in this way.⁷³ He intentionally picked the time during the festival of Passover, knowing that the city would be particularly full of people coming for the event. The meticulous preparations and the ruse with the donkey seemed to work, and the people came out and hailed him as the new king as he victoriously entered the city. Emboldened by this, Jesus proceeded to the Temple, where he chased away the vendors and the moneychangers, as if he were acting on some kind legal authority. Similarly, he publicly rebuked the Pharisees and the scribes and incited people to rebel against them. His clear goal was to stir up rebellion.⁷⁴ But, claims Reimarus, Jesus miscalculated and overestimated the loyalty of the people for his cause. As soon as they saw that there was a conflict coming, they started to abandon him, fearing that they might be implicated in the uprising. Ultimately, Jesus himself became afraid and began to keep a low profile, until he was discovered and betrayed. When he was crucified, it was clear to everyone that his mission to create a new kingdom on earth for the Jews had utterly failed.

Now the disciples were in an awkward position. Everything that they had preached and believed seemed to have ended in an absolute and complete failure. With human nature being what it is, they could not accept this, and so they made up a story to fit the new circumstances, a story that would allow them to portray the events not as a failure but as a victory. First they had to deny that Jesus' actual goal was ever to create a new kingdom for the Jews, although this was what they had thought all along and preached throughout the countryside. Then they recast his mission to be that of being the saviour for all humanity by his death. His crucifixion, instead of being the clearest possible indication of his failure, was thus turned into a sign of his victory. Reimarus explains:

We should note that ... all the disciples had thought of [Jesus] during his lifetime and until his death as nothing other than a worldly ruler and savior, not considering any other purpose of his teaching and deeds. Thus, the next conclusion for us to draw from this is that only after Jesus' death did the disciples grasp the doctrine of a spiritual suffering savior of all mankind.⁷⁵

In order to avoid presenting Christ's mission as a failure, they changed the story to fit their later view: 'Now, all the evangelists wrote their accounts of Jesus' teaching

⁷³ Zechariah 9:9; see Matthew 21:5.

⁷⁴ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 7, p. 147; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] II, § 7, pp. 147–8.

⁷⁵ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 30, pp. 128–9; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] I, § 30, pp. 116–17.

and deeds long after his death, after they had changed their idea and doctrine concerning his teaching and deeds.⁷⁶ He further explains:

As long as they had Jesus' actual words and deeds before them, they hoped that he would redeem Israel temporally, and their doctrine was based on actual fact. Now, however, that their hope is disappointed, in a few days they alter their entire doctrine and make of Jesus a suffering savior for all mankind; then they change their facts accordingly and Jesus must now say and promise during this lifetime things that they could not have known of before.⁷⁷

Instead of the narrative being an accurate reflection of the history that it purports to report, the history must be modified in order to make it conform to the new account, which is now ideologically motivated.⁷⁸ An attempt was thus made to go back and revise the original version of the story to reflect the new one. But according to Reimarus, there are still clear traces of the original version in the text that stand in blatant contradiction to the new, superimposed view.

But in order to make the new version plausible, the disciples had to concoct the story that Jesus rose from the dead after he was crucified and placed in the tomb. Reimarus thus takes great pains to explore the narratives about the Resurrection. He concludes that the disciples simply created the story in order to bolster their claims. He further argues that the miracles were made up and attributed to Christ by his followers in order to support their arguments for his divinity during the early period when Christianity was in disrepute. In short, the gospel writers were simply seeking to further their own social and political cause. But there is no evidence that any of the miracles ever really happened apart from the dubious word of corrupt and clearly biased parties with a strong personal interest in bending the truth or even creating a straightforward fiction. Reimarus concluded that Jesus never claimed to be divine and this was never a part of his message.

The most serious of these intentional fabrications was the claim that Jesus rose from the dead—a claim that the disciples tried to promulgate in order to lend credibility to their account of the mission of Jesus as the saviour for all humanity. Reimarus claims that after the death of Jesus and the disappointment of their hopes to attain wealth and mundane power by means of a new worldly kingdom,

⁷⁶ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 31, p. 129; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] I, § 31, pp. 117–18.

⁷⁷ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 33, pp. 133–4; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] I, § 33, p. 126.

⁷⁸ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 33, p. 134; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] I, § 33, pp. 126–7: 'both history and doctrine are to this extent unfounded; the history because it is not taken from events themselves and the experiences and reminiscences thus brought about, but is told as having happened simply so that it will agree with the new and altered hypothesis or the new doctrine, and the doctrine because it refers to facts that originated in the writers' thinking only after the doctrine was altered and which were simply fabricated and false.'

the disciples could not very well go back to their old trades and professions as, for example, fishermen. Poverty and disgrace prevented them from doing so. Since they had enjoyed some degree of financial good fortune by receiving alms as members of Jesus' movement, they were reluctant to return to their previous poorly paid professions. Moreover, they had given up everything in order to follow him, for example, their boats, nets, and other equipment. Thus they could not very well go back and demand to have these things back again. They were also keenly aware of a sense of failure and disgrace that threatened them. They had been foolish enough to give up everything and believe the promise of a new glorious kingdom, and now that it had failed, they had only their own naïveté and gullibility to blame for it. The prospect of returning to their old professions in ignominy after the failure was certainly not one they would have relished. To be exposed to chiding and ridicule was very different from occupying a place of respect and dignity as a member of the inner circle of the Messiah. The disciples were still driven by their original base motivations, according to Reimarus. They wanted to attain wealth and earthly power, and after the death of Jesus they were in a difficult situation. Their solution was to create a new story about the mission and nature of Jesus that would allow them to continue their work as his followers. A part of the plan was to revise the account of the mission of Jesus along the lines indicated.

Another equally important part of the plan was to circulate the idea that Jesus rose from the dead since this would seem to support the notion that he was greater than human and had a connection with the divine that would allow him to return again in all his glory in order to mete out just rewards and punishments. In order to make this claim, they first had to go out to the tomb and steal the body so that they could pretend that he had risen from the dead. Reimarus reasons:

Above all things, it was necessary to get rid of the body of Jesus as speedily as possible, in order that they might say he had arisen and ascended into heaven, and would promptly return from there with great power and glory. This design of disposing of the body of Jesus was easy to carry out. It lay entombed in a rock situated in Joseph's garden. Both the master and the gardener allowed the apostles to visit the grave by day or by night. They betray themselves by owning that anyone might have secretly removed the body. They bore the accusation made by the rulers and magistrates of having actually done it themselves by night, and nowhere did they dare to contradict the common report. In short, all circumstances combine to show that they really did carry out their undertaking, and added it later on to the foundation stone of their new doctrine.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 56, pp. 249–50; *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, [Part] II, § 56, pp. 243–4.

But the disciples were calculating enough not to announce right away that Jesus had risen since this would have risked provoking the authorities and prompting them to launch an investigation into the matter. Instead they waited forty days to make the claim since by this time it would have been impossible for anyone to look into the affair and perhaps produce the body of Jesus. The passage of time with the decay of the corpse would have rendered a positive identification of the body impossible.

Reimarus notes that the accounts of the way in which the tomb was found empty vary significantly among the gospels. In particular, there are several details in Matthew that are not to be found in the other versions. According to Matthew (28:1ff.), when Mary and Mary Magdalene arrived in order to anoint the body, the tomb was still sealed with a large rock. At that point there was a great earthquake, and a white angel descended and removed the rock. Upon seeing this, the guards who were posted became frightened. According to the accounts of the other gospel writers,⁸⁰ there was no earthquake, no help from angels, and no frightened guards; the stone was already removed from the entrance of the tomb when the women arrived.⁸¹ Reimarus concludes that these and many other inconsistencies and contradictions can only lead to serious doubt. If witnesses in a court of law gave such conflicting accounts of the events, their testimonies would be regarded as wholly worthless. It would thus be absurd to base one's religious faith on something that is so dubious.

Reimarus makes the claim that the proper methodology in such matters is to examine critically the sources and not to take anything on the authority of the text or the guarantees of priests or the Church. He thus gives a strong statement for the importance of source criticism, which can be seen as being in the general spirit of the Enlightenment. In the face of dubious claims, 'the only reasonable thing left for us to do, since our own experience is lacking, is to see if the surviving testimonies agree.'⁸² Reimarus notes that some of Jesus' own disciples were confused and incredulous to the idea that he rose from the dead. Given that even the disciples themselves from time to time doubted the key events, 'should we not have the right to put to the test the truth of their written reports to the extent that we see whether their testimony agrees?'⁸³ This leads him to a further critical comparison of the source texts.

The disciples thus claim that Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to them frequently over a period of forty days, during which time he spoke with them,

⁸⁰ Mark 16:1ff.; Luke 24:1ff.; John 20:1ff.

⁸¹ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 18, pp. 170–1; 'Fünftes Fragment. Ueber die Auferstehungsgeschichte,' in *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur. Aus den Schätzen der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel*, vol. 4, ed. by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Braunschweig: im Verlage der Buchhandlung des Fürstl. Waysenhauses 1777, p. 458.

⁸² Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 18, p. 173; 'Fünftes Fragment. Ueber die Auferstehungsgeschichte,' p. 461.

⁸³ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 18, p. 173; 'Fünftes Fragment. Ueber die Auferstehungsgeschichte,' p. 462.

lived with them, ate with them, etc. Reimarus explores their accounts of this period in great detail and finds them to be wrought with contradictions and inconsistencies.⁸⁴ He notes that it is highly suspicious that during the entire period after Jesus rose from the dead, he only showed himself to the immediate circle of his disciples. During the entire forty days he never once was seen by a neutral witness who could corroborate their story. If they wished to make their story more credible and to win more converts for the cause, then what would be a better way to do so than to have Jesus present himself before large crowds of people in Jerusalem, or even better before Pontus Pilate or the Sanhedrin?⁸⁵ This would clearly have put the authorities on the defensive and vindicated the disciples' original claims. But instead, Jesus only appeared to his own followers, who did not even bother to communicate this to anyone else until after he had ascended to heaven. Reimarus points out that this is clearly at odds with what is claimed to be the stated goal of Jesus' mission, that is, that God reveals Himself to human beings by means of his Son. How is one to make sense of this revelation if, in fact, instead of revealing something, it hides and conceals it: 'Is that why he came from heaven, to remain incognito? Not to reveal himself as one from heaven?'⁸⁶

Reimarus also casts doubt on the accounts of the Ascension. After the forty days, it is said that Jesus simply ascended into heaven, and this has become a central point of Christian dogma and yet another demonstration of his divinity. Reimarus notes that the story of the Ascension actually only appears in two of the gospel writers, namely, Mark and Luke. But neither of these two was among the twelve disciples, and thus they were not among those to whom Jesus showed himself after he rose from the dead. In short, the accounts of Mark and Luke are based only on hearsay and not first-hand experience. By contrast, the two purported first-hand witnesses, Matthew and John, do not claim that Jesus ascended to heaven at all but rather that he simply unceremoniously disappeared.⁸⁷

Reimarus' critical account of the Bible called into question the credibility of the entire work and all the doctrines that claim to be based on it. It seemed impossible to continue to maintain that the mission of Christ was to be the saviour of all

⁸⁴ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 20, p. 174; 'Fünftes Fragment. Ueber die Auferstehungsgeschichte,' p. 462: 'The first thing that we notice concerning the consistency of the four evangelists is that their stories diverge from each other in almost each and every point of the affair, and each one reads differently.'

⁸⁵ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 32, pp. 199–200; 'Fünftes Fragment. Ueber die Auferstehungsgeschichte,' p. 493: 'If only he had manifested himself one single time after his resurrection in the temple, before the people and the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, visibly, audibly, tangibly, then it could not fail that the entire Jewish nation would have believed in him; thus many thousands of souls plus millions of souls of their descendants would have been saved from destruction, who are now so hardened and stubborn.'

⁸⁶ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 32, p. 199; 'Fünftes Fragment. Ueber die Auferstehungsgeschichte,' p. 492.

⁸⁷ Reimarus, *Fragments*, § 32, p. 197; 'Fünftes Fragment. Ueber die Auferstehungsgeschichte,' pp. 490–1: 'I may say frankly that there is almost no single circumstance from the death of Jesus to the end of the story where their [sc. Matthew's and John's] accounts might be made to agree. And yet it is quite remarkable that both of them omit Jesus' ascension; in their accounts he disappears and no one knows what has become of him, just as if they knew nothing about it or as if it were a mere trifle.'

humanity whose goal was to atone for our sins if in fact that was all simply an ad hoc fabrication made up by self-interested disciples after the fact in order to help them present in a positive light what was in reality a disaster. Likewise, it seemed impossible to defend the claim that Jesus rose from the dead, returned for forty days, and then ascended to heaven if our only testimonies for these are utterly contradictory and dubious. Indeed, if the whole thing were simply a lie perpetrated by the disciples in order to further their cause, then it would seem impossible to continue to maintain the key Christian dogmas. With this, the Enlightenment spirit had again called into question the veracity of the Christian dogmas, this time by means of careful critical analysis of the biblical texts. The result was again to erode the belief in the dogmas, which were once regarded as central for Christian faith.

Reimarus' attack on the Bible was particularly problematic for Lutheranism. Luther rejected the authority of the Church, the pope, and the clergy and placed the responsibility for religious belief in the conscience of each individual. Each person was responsible for his own faith based on his or her own reading of the Bible. Thus, it was an important dimension of the Reformation that the Bible be translated into the vernacular languages and disseminated as widely as possible—a process facilitated by the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg. Thus the Bible came to play a much more central role in Lutheranism than it had previously in Catholicism. For this reason the undermining of the Bible that Reimarus effected, seemed to be tantamount to undermining Christianity as such. It was thought that if the truth and legitimacy of the Bible were to fall, so also would Christianity. Thus it is no surprise that 'the fragments' unleashed a great controversy,⁸⁸ with numerous pastors and theologians regarding them as highly threatening for Christianity as such. The leading figures to respond to this challenge were Johann Daniel Schumann (1714–87),⁸⁹ Johann Heinrich Ress (1732–1803),⁹⁰ and Johann Melchior Goeze (1717–86).⁹¹

⁸⁸ For the controversy in general, see Henry E. Allison, *Lessing and the Enlightenment: His Philosophy of Religion and its Relation to Eighteenth-Century Thought*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press 1966, pp. 95–120. Toshimasa Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, pp. 41–71. Karl Barth, 'Lessing' in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Brian Cozens and John Bowden, London: SCM Press 2001, pp. 220–51. William Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 1, *From Deism to Tübingen*, pp. 165–77.

⁸⁹ [Johann Daniel Schumann], *Ueber die Evidenz der Beweise für die Wahrheit der Christlichen Religion*, Hannover: Im Verlag der Schmidtschen Buchhandlung 1778.

⁹⁰ Johann Heinrich Ress, *Die Auferstehungs-Geschichte Jesu Christi gegen einige im vierten Beytrage zu Geschichte und Litteratur aus den Schätzen der herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel gemachte neuere Einwendungen vertheidigt*, Braunschweig: Im Verlage der Fürstl. Waysenhaus-Buchhandlung 1777.

⁹¹ Johann Melchior Goeze, *Etwas Vorläufiges gegen des Herrn Hofrats Lessings mittelbare und unmittelbare feindselige Angriffe auf unsre allerheiligste Religion, und auf den einigen Lehrgrund derselben, die heilige Schrift*, Hamburg: D. A. Harmsen 1778.

2

The Enlightenment's Criticism of Religion: Philosophy

The Enlightenment's criticism of religion played an important role not just for theology and Biblical studies but also for philosophy. The Enlightenment thinkers called into question the role of history for Christianity. For Christianity to be true, was it necessary that every point of its history be true and verifiable? This issue was taken up by Lessing in his defence of Reimarus' text. David Hume examined closely the traditional arguments for the existence of God and found them wanting, thus casting doubt on the rationality of religious belief. He turned the question into one of epistemology. In his attempt to develop a general epistemological theory, Kant tried to separate what was a true object of knowledge and what was not, and he concluded that only objects of possible experience could be known. Given this, he was obliged to argue that it was impossible to know God based on theoretical reason. Whatever we think about God, it is not reasonably grounded in metaphysics. In the present chapter we will examine these philosophical criticisms of religion from these key Enlightenment thinkers in order to gain a clearer picture of Hegel's assessment of them.

2.1 Lessing: The Crisis of History

The publication of parts of Reimarus' work evoked a number of criticisms. Since these were aimed not just at the anonymous author of 'the fragments', but also at the editor himself who was perceived to be attacking Christianity by publishing them, Lessing found himself obliged to respond and clarify his position on the issue. He clearly seems to have anticipated some of the criticisms since, as early as his 'Editorial Commentary' which accompanies the 'fragments', he tries to show that the analyses of the Bible that are presented in the text do not pose any threat to Christianity. In a series of polemical pamphlets that appeared in response to the objections, Lessing makes it clear that while he does not agree with everything that is said in the work that he presented, he believes that the criticisms of it are misplaced and the critics are overwrought alarmists. He claims that they assume that for Christianity everything hangs on the truth of the Bible. But this, he argues, is a mistaken assumption:

In short, the letter is not the spirit, and the Bible is not religion. Consequently, objections to the letter and to the Bible need not also be objections to the spirit and to religion. For the Bible obviously contains more than what pertains to religion, and it is merely a hypothesis that it must be equally infallible in this additional respect. Religion also existed before there was a Bible. Christianity existed before the evangelists and apostles wrote about it. Some time elapsed before the first of them wrote, and a very considerable time elapsed before the whole canon was established. Thus, however much may depend on these writings, it is impossible for the whole truth of religion to be based on them.¹

While the Bible is a flawed text, written by human beings, Christianity is much greater than this. Lessing thus argues that only uncertain Christians who are of wavering belief will be threatened by the kind of analysis found in the fragments.

He uses an intriguing image to describe the situation between those who criticize Christianity and those who wish to defend it. He imagines Christianity to be a strong fortress, surrounded by various outposts and lines of defence, which are occasionally tested by its opponents. He writes:

No enemy has yet surrounded the fortress completely; none has mounted a simultaneous assault on all its fortifications. The attacks have always been mounted only on an outwork, often of very little significance, which has been defended with more fervor than astuteness on the part of the besieged. For their usual maxim was to direct all their fire at the single point of attack, regardless of whether or not another enemy was meanwhile scaling the undefended walls. What I mean is that a single proof has often been overstretched, to the detriment of all the others as well as itself. A single nail was supposed to support everything, and it supported nothing.²

Lessing's point is clear: it is more prudent to defend the fortress itself and not necessarily all of its outworks. This can be taken to be characteristic of the general approach of the Enlightenment in response to the critics of religion. The strategy was to abandon the outworks, that is, the doctrines or aspects of Christianity which were regarded as indefensible in order to save the heart of the matter. This meant, of course, picking and choosing the essential aspects in order to discern which ones could be surrendered without serious consequences. Thus, Lessing

¹ Lessing, 'Editorial Commentary on the "Fragments" of Reimarus,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, trans. by H. B. Nisbet, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, p. 63; 'Gegensätze des Herausgebers,' in *Zur Geschichte und Litteratur. Aus den Schätzen der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel*, vol. 4, ed. by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Braunschweig: Im Verlage der Buchhandlung des Fürstl. Waysenhauses 1777, p. 495. See also 'Axioms,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 127; [Lessing], *Axiomata, wenn es deren in dergleichen Dingen gibt?*, Braunschweig: n.p. 1778, pp. 21–2.

² Lessing, 'Editorial Commentary on the "Fragments" of Reimarus,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 64; 'Gegensätze des Herausgebers,' p. 497.

claims that Christians do not need to insist stubbornly on the truth of every detail of the Bible; the truth of Christianity can still be maintained without resorting to such extremes of implausibility.

In his article 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power',³ Lessing points out that in ancient times people were inclined to believe since they were first-hand witnesses to miracles that seemed to attest to the truth of Christianity. However, for those of us who live so many centuries later when miracles no longer happen, it is not reasonable to expect us to believe in the same way as our ancient ancestors did. We are not witnesses to miracles but only have historical reports about them. But these reports can in no way have the same persuasive power as actually witnessing the miracles for ourselves. What is required for Christianity today is thus a form of belief that is in accordance with the situation of our own time.

In this piece Lessing takes on the general question of the reliability of any historical account. He claims that there is plenty of room for doubt about any historical report that comes down to us from the past. He uses the example of Alexander the Great: 'We all believe that someone called Alexander lived, who in a short time conquered almost the whole of Asia. But who, on the strength of this belief, would risk anything of great and lasting importance whose loss would be irreplaceable.'⁴ While specialists in ancient Greek history might debate the details of the number of men in Alexander's army or the exact day or location of specific battles, none of them would be willing to bet their entire livelihood, let alone their eternal salvation on the truth of this kind of thing. There is always room for doubt about what Lessing refers to as 'contingent truths of history'.⁵ In short, historical truths can never be absolutely demonstrated. Even if historical accounts of miracles are as reliable as historical truths can be, this still does not say very much and would demonstrate nothing with certainty.

In another piece Lessing draws an analogy between the ancient historians of Roman history and the gospel writers. He points out that there are always discrepancies and inconsistencies in the accounts of the pagan authors when they describe the same event. But this does not lead us to conclude that the event never took place or that these are necessarily bad or deceiving historians. He then draws the analogy to the gospel writers: 'If, then we treat Livy and

³ With the title of this piece Lessing refers to 1 Corinthians 2:3–5, where Paul says, 'And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.' Here the point is that it is 'the Spirit' and 'the power' that in antiquity had the persuasive power for people (that is, through miracles, fulfilled prophecies, etc.), but today this power has been lost since miracles no longer happen. See Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 84; [Lessing], *Ueber den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, Braunschweig: n.p. 1777, p. 5.

⁴ Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 86; *Ueber den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, p. 10.

⁵ Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 85; *Ueber den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, p. 9.

Dionysius [of Halicarnassus] and Polybius and Tacitus openly and generously enough not to put their every syllable on the rack, why should we not do the same with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?⁶ Lessing's general point seems to be that Reimarus has implicitly set an unrealistic standard for historical truth and then found the gospels guilty of not meeting it. However, a more sober understanding of history knows that there is never complete harmony or absence of all ambiguity among the historical sources. It simply lies in the nature of historical study that there will always remain a degree of uncertainty. Hegel also takes up this point and agrees with Lessing on the limitations of historical knowledge.⁷ For Hegel, the truth of Christianity concerns the higher faculty of reason and not empirical truth.

The absurdity in this is that the 'fragments' have provoked the critics to accept implicitly this naïve conception of history and then to attempt to try to defend the Bible based on this criterion. But since the historical standard for truth that the 'fragments' presupposes is so high, all attempts to reach it are doomed to failure. This allows Lessing to clarify his own position with respect to the work. He states tersely, 'I accepted the premise, but I rejected the conclusion.'⁸ In short, Lessing accepts that the Bible contains the contradictions and inconsistencies that Reimarus has pointed out, but he refuses to accept the conclusion that Reimarus draws from this, namely, that Christianity is thereby undermined. He argues that the analysis of the 'fragments' merely makes it clear that it would be unwise to base our faith on the historical record since this can always be called into question. Although he rejects what he perceives as very bad defences of Christianity, namely, those that try to make the case for the definitive historical truth of the gospels, this is not to say that he is criticizing Christianity. Instead, he wants to find a more adequate form of defence for it. He states, one 'must not assume that a person who doubts *certain* proofs of something also doubts the thing itself'.⁹

Lessing then comes to formulate his famous thesis about the limited nature of historical claims, and this provides the initial indication of his own conception of where the essence of Christianity lies and how it should be defended. He writes, 'contingent truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.'¹⁰ Here Lessing draws on Leibniz's distinction between truths of fact and truths of reason.¹¹ For Leibniz there are, on the one hand, empirical truths about the world that we perceive around us: the cat is on the mat. These truths carry no necessity with them since they could just as well be the case or not the case. No

⁶ Lessing, 'A Rejoinder,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 100; [Lessing], *Eine Duplik*, Braunschweig: In der Buchhandlung des Fürstl. Waisenhauses 1778, p. 17.

⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 330–1; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 253–4.

⁸ Lessing, 'A Rejoinder,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 99; *Eine Duplik*, p. 13.

⁹ Lessing, 'Axioms,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 122; *Axiomata, wenn es deren in dergleichen Dingen gibt?*, p. 8.

¹⁰ Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 85; *Ueber den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, p. 9.

¹¹ See Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment*, pp. 60–2.

logical contradiction follows from the fact that the cat is on the mat or not on the mat. Thus these truths are contingent. There are also, by contrast, truths of reason, that is, truths of logic, mathematics, and geometry which are always true and independent of any historical circumstance. It cannot be the case that $2 + 3$ is equal to 5 on one day and 6 on the next. Lessing then draws on this distinction, associating the truths of fact with historical truths. A war or revolution may or may not have taken place at a given time and place. This is the side of Christianity that is of less importance, namely, its historical dimension which will always be open to debate and criticism as to its accuracy. However, there is also another side, and this is where Lessing identifies the locus of the true essence of Christianity. Specifically, Christianity contains certain truths of reason, propositions which are true in and of themselves and which are not in need of any further argument or justification. Lessing argues that there will always be a gap between the one class of truths and that of the other. One can never reach a truth of reason by means of truths of history. At some point in the argument there will always be a gap in the argumentation that requires a leap.¹² Lessing claims, 'this is the broad and ugly ditch which I cannot get across, no matter how often and earnestly I have tried to make the leap.'¹³

While the negative aspect of Lessing's position, that is, the criticism of historical apologetics seems reasonable, there is something profoundly counterintuitive about his main claim. It is odd to think of the teachings of Jesus as carrying the necessity of a mathematical truth, but this is what Lessing implies. Indeed, he repeatedly draws the analogy to mathematics. In one passage he writes: 'Suppose there were a great and useful mathematical truth which the discoverer had arrived at by way of an obviously false proof ... Should I therefore deny this truth or decline to make use of it?'¹⁴ The teachings of Jesus, he seems to claim, are true in the same way that mathematical truths are true, and therefore the details of the historical events surrounding these truths are ultimately irrelevant since they cannot call into question the veracity of these teachings. In a different text, Lessing imagines a dialogue between himself and his critic Johann Melchior Goeze. Using Goeze's texts, Lessing interjects his own remarks in response. The key issue is the alleged 'inner truth' of Christianity that Lessing is advocating, that is, the claim that Christianity is based on truths of reason independent of the

¹² Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 87; *Ueber den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, p. 13. This is, of course, the source of Kierkegaard's concept of the leap of faith. See Curtis L. Thompson, 'Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Appropriating the Testimony of a Theological Naturalist,' in *Kierkegaard and the Renaissance and Modern Traditions*, Tome I, *Philosophy*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Aldershot: Ashgate 2009 (*Kierkegaard Research: Sources, Reception and Resources*, vol. 5), pp. 77–112; see pp. 91–7.

¹³ Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 87; *Ueber den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, p. 13.

¹⁴ Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 88; *Ueber den Beweis des Geistes und der Kraft*, pp. 15–16. (Translation slightly modified.)

historical circumstances. The dialogue begins by Goeze asking where one will 'get his knowledge of the inner truth of the Christian religion from'.¹⁵ Lessing responds, 'From itself. That is why it is called the inner truth, the truth which requires no external confirmation.'¹⁶ To this Goeze wishes to add the qualifier, 'except from the written traditions, or from the writings of the evangelists and apostles'.¹⁷ In his response to this, Lessing again draws an analogy to mathematics and geometry: 'What must we take from these? The inner truth? Or our earliest historical knowledge of this truth? The former would be as strange as if I were to regard a geometric theorem as true not because of its demonstration, but because it appears in Euclid.'¹⁸ The idea seems clearly that Jesus reached some eternal truth of reason, which he taught and which has been universally recognized by humanity ever since. This truth requires no further justification and is not vulnerable to historical criticism.

What Lessing seems to refer to by this is Christ's ethical teachings. The command to love one's neighbour is, for example, something that he takes to be a universally true ethical maxim. It might have been Jesus who came up with this at a certain time and place historically, but it might just as well have been someone else at some other time or place. These historical matters are irrelevant for the truth of reason that this ethical command represents. It is true in and of itself regardless of who first articulated it or when. Here one sees a significant reduction in the content of Christianity. Like some of the other important figures of the Enlightenment, Lessing seems to reduce Christianity just to its ethical dimension.

Lessing's famous *Nathan the Wise*, which was one of Hegel's favourite dramatic works,¹⁹ was written immediately after and as a continuation of the controversy surrounding the Reimarus fragments. This work repeatedly emphasizes the word 'human being' (*Mensch*) as opposed to members of individual nations, peoples, or religions. In this way Lessing implies that there is a universal religion of humanity that transcends the individual religions and their specific dogmas. The ethical

¹⁵ Lessing, 'Axioms,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 140; *Axiomata, wenn es deren in dergleichen Dingen gibt?*, p. 58.

¹⁶ Lessing, 'Axioms,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 140; *Axiomata, wenn es deren in dergleichen Dingen gibt?*, p. 58.

¹⁷ Lessing, 'Axioms,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 140; *Axiomata, wenn es deren in dergleichen Dingen gibt?*, p. 58.

¹⁸ Lessing, 'Axioms,' in *Philosophical and Theological Writings*, p. 140; *Axiomata, wenn es deren in dergleichen Dingen gibt?*, p. 58.

¹⁹ Hegel was a meticulous student of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* and refers to it frequently in his early writings on religion: see *TE*, pp. 37–9; *TJ*, pp. 10–12. *TE*, p. 45; *TJ*, p. 17. *TE*, p. 62; *TJ*, p. 33. *TE*, p. 64; *TJ*, p. 34. *TE*, p. 91; *TJ*, p. 60. *TE*, p. 129; *TJ*, p. 100. *ETW*, p. 92; *TJ*, p. 170. *ETW*, p. 107; *TJ*, p. 183. *ETW*, p. 116; *TJ*, p. 190. *ETW*, p. 150n; *TJ*, p. 218n. *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 392; *Jub.*, vol. 12, pp. 519–20. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1012; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 289. See also *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1180; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 509: 'Lessing struggled in his *Nathan* to vindicate his moral faith against narrow religious orthodoxy.' He also quotes it in a text that he wrote as a student in Tübingen praising the study of the classical Greek and Roman literature, 'Über einige Vorteile, welche uns die Lektüre der alten klassischen griechischen und römischen Schriftsteller gewährt,' *Dokumente*, p. 169. See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, pp. 14–15.

dimension of this is obvious in the parable of the ring that Nathan recounts to the Sultan Saladin. According to the story, there was a magical ring that 'had the mysterious power of making whoever wore it agreeable to God and human beings, as long as the wearer believed in its power.'²⁰ The ring passed from father to son until it ended in the hands of a man with three equally beloved sons. With his death approaching, the father, not knowing which son to give the ring to, ordered two other identical rings made. They were copies so perfect that not even the father could tell the new rings from the real one. He gave one of the rings to each of his sons and then died. The sons quarrelled among one another about who had the real ring, each claiming to possess the authentic one and claiming that the other two were fakes. The matter was taken to a court of law for adjudication. The judge found it impossible to make a judgement since there was no way to determine who had the real ring. But then he hit upon an idea: 'But wait! I hear that the true ring has the miraculous power of making its wearer loved, agreeable to God and human beings. That should decide the matter.'²¹ But with the three sons quarrelling and bickering, it seemed doubtful that any of the rings was real. So the judge enjoined the three to go and lead moral and righteous lives since this would be the best demonstration that they were in possession of the real ring.

The idea with the story is clearly to draw an analogue between the three rings and the three monotheistic religions that have historically so often been in conflict: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each religion has its convinced followers arguing that theirs is the correct one. No scholarly proof is available to adjudicate these disputes; each of the religions has a legitimate claim in history, but these claims can never be definitively confirmed or disconfirmed. According to the analogy, the best religion is the one that brings about the best ethical acts and virtuous deeds in its followers. Only by the good actions of the individual can it be determined whether or not he carries the magical ring. With this analogy, Lessing seems to want to abstract from all the important points of difference in dogmatics that separate these religions. These are insignificant, and only ethical action can reveal the true religion. Like Voltaire, Lessing pleads for a form of faith which is universal, standing above the traditional religions. One can worship God through whatever prophet, moral teacher, or religious tradition one wishes, but the main thing is not the dogma but the result for ethical action.

²⁰ Lessing, *Nathan the Wise with Related Documents*, trans. and ed. by Ronald Schlechter, Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's 2004, p. 71; *Nathan der Weise. Ein Dramatisches Gedicht in fünf Aufzügen*, [Berlin]: n.p. 1779, p. 143. See Hegel's reference to this famous episode: *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 392; *Jub.*, vol. 12, pp. 519–20: 'Of an equal breadth of content is the familiar story of Boccaccio which Lessing has used in *Nathan* for his parable of the three rings. Here too the story, taken independently, is entirely commonplace, but it points to a matter of the widest scope, the difference and the truth of the three religions, Jewish, Mohammedan, and Christian.' Hegel refers to the source of the story of the rings in Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*, Day 1, Tale 3. See *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*, trans. by Richard Aldington, New York: Dell 1962, pp. 59–61.

²¹ Lessing, *Nathan the Wise with Related Documents*, p. 73; *Nathan der Weise*, p. 148.

In another scene, the Sultan speaks with his sister Sittah, who reproaches Christians for rigidly insisting on the importance of being a Christian and following Christ, instead of simply trying to imitate Christ's ethical teachings and actions. She argues:

[the Christians'] pride is to be Christians, not human beings. For even those things that their Founder gave them, those things that season superstition with humanity, they don't love because they are humane, but because Christ taught them, because Christ did them ... His name has to be spread everywhere, has to slander and swallow up the names of all good people. For them it's all about the name, only the name.²²

The point is clearly that Christians should focus rather on the action which is just and righteous in itself and not so much on the fact that it was Christ who did it. There are many moral people and teachers of ethics, and so why do Christians think that Christ has a monopoly on moral action? The Christians should celebrate moral actions as such and not just the fact that Christ performed them. The issue should not be primarily about the *name*, that is, associating the action with the name of Christ, but rather about the *action* or *ethical principle* itself. In the so-called 'Bern Fragments' and 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion' Hegel refers to precisely this passage.²³

By focusing just on the truths of reason and the ethical dimension, Lessing seems to give up the divinity of Christ, the Resurrection and other key dogmas. For this reason, he is rather vague in sketching his own positive view in this regard since if he were to allow himself to be pinned down by his critics on the specific 'truths of reason' that he believes Christianity represents, it would be abundantly clear that he has in fact jettisoned a number of key dogmas that his opponents doubtless wish to preserve.

Hegel knew these debates and refers critically to Goeze.²⁴ He claims that the Bible alone, important as it may be, is in need of interpretation and cannot be understood immediately.²⁵ No argument can be won simply by citing a Biblical passage, which can always be understood in different ways. Lessing's strategy can be said to anticipate that of Hegel in some respects. Like Hegel, Lessing rejects the details of history as irrelevant for the bigger picture of the truth of Christianity. In a passage from the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* Hegel echoes Lessing's view:

²² Lessing, *Nathan the Wise with Related Documents*, p. 46; *Nathan der Weise*, p. 67.

²³ Hegel, 'Bern Fragments', in *TE*, p. 91; *TJ*, p. 60. 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion', in *ETW*, p. 72; *TJ*, p. 156. *ETW*, p. 175; *TJ*, p. 145.

²⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 258, note 29; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 185n.

²⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 258; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 185.

Make of Christ what you will, exegetically, critically, historically—demonstrate as you please how the doctrines of the Church were established by Councils and attained currency as the result of this or that episcopal interest or passion, or originated in this or that quarter—let all such circumstances have been what they might—the only concerning question is: What is the idea of the truth in and for itself.²⁶

Also like Hegel, Lessing wants to claim that the truth of Christianity is to be found in truths of reason that can be universally and definitively demonstrated. Where they differ, however, is in the relation between these two claims. Lessing's strategy for rescuing Christianity involves radically separating the contingent historical dimension from the rational, truth-bearing dimension. Hegel, by contrast, sees the latter as a part of the historical development itself. While Hegel agrees that the minute details of the historical records are contingent and can be debated endlessly, this is not the task of the philosophical method, which sees the wider development of history from a conceptual perspective. Thus, like Lessing, Hegel is not threatened by the problems raised by Reimarus. These belong to the empirical material that historians can discuss as much as they want. But they do not impinge on the truth of Christianity as the culmination of the historical development of the religions of the world. Moreover, Hegel believes that his approach, in contrast to Lessing, will allow him to preserve the key Christian doctrines, whereas Lessing, like so many of his contemporaries, has simply dropped them since they are regarded as implausible.

Although Hegel does not mention Reimarus explicitly, he does polemicize directly against a specific form of Biblical exegesis which he calls the 'theology of reason'. In addition to Reimarus, the most important rationalist theologians of the period included figures such as Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten (1706–57), Johann Salomo Semler (1725–91), Johann Friedrich Röhr (1777–1848), Julius August Ludwig Wegscheider (1771–1849), and Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761–1851). It is presumably to people like this and to the movement then known as 'Neologism' that Hegel refers when he states in his lectures: 'Because exegesis draws upon reason for counsel, what happened is that a so-called *rational theology* came into being, opposed to the doctrinal system in the form established by the church. In part, this was the church's own doing, in part it

²⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 325–6; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 417–18. See also *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 331; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 424: 'It is a matter of perfect indifference where a thing originated; the only question is: "Is it true in and for itself?" ... Whether a Christian doctrine stands exactly thus or thus in the Bible—the point to which the exegetical scholars or modern times devote all their attention—is not the only question. The Letter kills, the Spirit makes alive: this they say to themselves, yet pervert the sentiment by taking the *understanding* for the *spirit*.' See also *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 167; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 77. *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 260; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 187.

was the doing of the thinking to which the church is opposed.²⁷ What he describes is exactly what is done in the fragments: by means of a careful analysis of the biblical texts, key points of Christian dogmatics are undermined, such as the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the Second Coming of Christ. It should also be noted that Rosenkranz mentions the 'fragments' as an important part of the background that shaped the thought of Hegel during his time in Bern.²⁸ As a student at the theological seminary in Tübingen only ten years after the conflict, it is unthinkable that Hegel would have been unfamiliar with it.

Hegel's criticism is that this kind of exegesis is contingent and highly subjective. It fails to see the speculative truth of the key dogmas, while it goes about the work of undermining them. Hegel thus believes that this theology of reason leads to an arbitrariness of argumentation. By contrast, he thinks that speculative reasoning is necessary, and this is the road that will lead away from the arbitrariness of rational theology.²⁹ While this kind of exegesis is determined to discover the truth of the historical events by means of an examination of the concrete empirical evidence, Hegel's view is that this is overly fixated on the specific events and fails to see the larger conceptual picture. The essence of Christianity is not any specific empirical thing or event but rather an idea. This idea is universal and, according to Hegel's speculative logic, necessary, while empirical events are always contingent. Again in agreement with Lessing, Hegel believes that such contingent things would be a poor foundation for Christian faith.

In a sense Hegel's response to the apparently revolutionary and incendiary movements in biblical studies of his day was much the same as Lessing's response to the critics of the 'fragments'. Lessing claimed that it was a mistake to pin one's faith on the Bible since, as a book written by human beings, it contained errors like any human product. But the essence of Christianity exists independently of this book. It is thus wrong to regard the Bible as the final word. Christianity is more than simply the written account; it is an idea. This is also Hegel's view. The results of the philological studies about the scriptures are largely irrelevant to the actual truth of Christianity. The studies of scripture are invariably bound up in the empirical details of the events, but the truth of Christianity transcends all of these contingent events.

²⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 122–3; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 39. For Hegel's criticism of rationalist biblical exegesis, see also his review 'Aphorismen über Nichtwissen und absolutes Wissen im Verhältnisse zur christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis. — Ein Beitrag zum Verständnisse der Philosophie unserer Zeit. Von Carl Friederich G... l.—Berlin, bei E. Franklin. 1829,' *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, 1829, nos 99–102, pp. 789–816; nos 105–6, pp. 833–5; see pp. 816–17. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, vols 16–17 (1834–35) in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 17, pp. 111–48, see pp. 144–5. In *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 276–313; see pp. 309–10. (In English as 'Review of K. F. Göschel's *Aphorisms*,' in *MW*, pp. 401–29; see pp. 425–6.)

²⁸ See Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1844, p. 50.

²⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 167; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 76–7.

2.2 Hume: Criticism of the Proofs of God's Existence

While much of the general tendency of the age focused on a criticism of different aspects or dogmas of Christianity, for example, in the works of Voltaire or Reimarus, there was a loose consensus in favour of natural religion. As was noted in the previous chapter, although many thinkers were keen to jettison what they regarded as absurd or pernicious elements of Christianity, they never ultimately doubted the existence of some kind of Supreme Being. This belief, which was so characteristic of the Enlightenment, remained the largely unquestioned assumption of many thinkers of the period until David Hume. As noted, many Enlightenment thinkers found the notion of God as a watchmaker persuasive and intuitive. They observed the order of the universe around them and concluded that such an order could not have arisen of its own accord. One could cast bricks, wood, glass, and mortar onto the ground, but they would never spontaneously form a house. For this to happen one requires a builder. So also, by analogy, there must be some master builder of the universe who gave it structure and organization. This form of the argument from design was widely accepted during the eighteenth century.

Hume put this argument, in two separate versions, in the mouth of his character Cleanthes in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, which appeared posthumously in 1779. While Cleanthes is fictional, he is intended to represent the progressive spirit of the Enlightenment generally and thus is contrasted to the conservative and religiously minded Demea and the skeptical critic Philo. In Parts II and III Cleanthes articulates the argument from design (or the teleological argument) with two separate formulations with different nuances.³⁰ Like the leading figures of the Enlightenment, Cleanthes believes that he is thoroughly disabused of ignorance and superstition and that his view is based solely on science and empiricism. He is firmly convinced that his empirical observation of the world has provided the clear evidence to support his conclusion of a deity. He enjoins his interlocutors, 'Look round the world: contemplate the whole and every part of it.'³¹ In the age of the telescope and the microscope, it is in the empirical observation of science that one can find evidence for the divine. Cleanthes claims to base his argument on a kind of induction similar to that seen in scientific observation. In short, when we see a thing that every time produces the same effect under the same conditions, then the next time we observe that thing, we intuitively

³⁰ Hume, 'Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,' in *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion*, ed. by J. C. A. Gaskin, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, p. 45 and p. 56. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, [no place or publisher listed] 1779, p. 25 and p. 43. For Hume's *Dialogues*, see David O'Connor, *Hume on Religion*, London and New York: Routledge 2001; J. C. A. Gaskin, *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, London: Macmillan 1978; Stanley Tveymann, *Scepticism and Belief in Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Dordrecht: Kluwer 1986.

³¹ Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 45; *Dialogues* (1779), p. 25.

infer the effect even before it happens. When we see lightening, then we hear thunder. When we see a house, we infer a builder or architect; likewise, when we see an ordered universe, we infer a master builder, that is, God.

Philo soundly refutes this argument by demonstrating that this is not a genuine case of induction since the cases are too dissimilar, whereas induction requires the cases to be as close to identical as possible. In short, Cleanthes is following a pseudoscientific and not a genuinely scientific method. By contrast, Hume has Philo give naturalistic explanations for the origin and development of the universe (in Parts VII and VIII). Philo himself readily admits that his explanations might ultimately contain some shortcomings given the difficult nature of the issue at hand and its remoteness from ordinary human experience. Nonetheless the key to his explanations is that he does not have to appeal to any divine intervention. He regards the universe and nature as self-developing and thus as standing in no need of explanation by means of something else.

A refutation is also given of the famous cosmological argument, which Hume puts in the mouth of Demea in Part IX.³² Demea reasons that everything has a cause that is other than itself, or, in other words, nothing is self-caused. Given this, it follows that the universe itself must be caused by something. When we trace all of the causes back to the very beginning, we invariably end up with a first cause which is necessary for everything else that follows. Somewhat oddly, Hume leaves it to Demea's fellow theist Cleanthes to refute this argument and not to the skeptic and consistent critic in the dialogue, Philo. Cleanthes produces a series of objections to this approach. First, he claims that no matter of fact or empirical truth can ever be demonstrated a priori or as necessary.³³ The existence of something is always contingent in the sense that one can always imagine the universe without it, and no contradiction arises from this. There is no conceptual contradiction in the idea that a particular person does not exist or that God does not exist. He further objects that if this kind of reasoning were correct, then why does Demea not simply stop with the physical universe as the first cause and say that it is a necessary being? Cleanthes' point is that nothing further is added to the explanation by saying that it was God who caused this.³⁴ In a sense Cleanthes here can be seen to apply the same kind of regression objection that Philo had raised against his argument. In any case, the argument for God as the first cause is also rendered implausible by Hume's dialogue.

The last big topic of Hume's dialogues is the problem of evil, discussed in Parts X and XI. This discussion can also be regarded as an objection to the existence of God. In this context, it is Philo who presents the problem and Cleanthes who attempts to argue against it, apparently in vain. Philo poses the problem of how a

³² Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pp. 90–1; *Dialogues* (1779), pp. 91–2.

³³ Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 91; *Dialogues* (1779), p. 92.

³⁴ Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 92; *Dialogues* (1779), pp. 93–4.

merciful, benevolent, and just God can allow such terrible suffering and evil in the world if He is also omnipotent and could change things if He wished. One is obliged to give up on one of these divine properties: 'Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?'³⁵ Cleanthes makes some vain attempts to counter this reasoning by denying that there really is so much evil and suffering in the world. But his arguments are quickly proven to be fallacious and completely out of tune with common sense and actual experience.

Despite Hume's portrayal of Philo capitulating in a completely unmotivated manner and in effect retracting his criticisms in the final chapter, the damage has already been done. The refutations that he has presented of the proofs for God's existence must have been compelling for most readers. Hume's famous criticisms of these traditional arguments, including those of the deists, undermined not just Christianity in particular but religion in general. It subverted the deists' already hollow conception of the divine as an abstract Supreme Being. Hume had taken the argument a step further than his contemporaries, who were eager to reject long-held conceptions of the divine, provided that they could hold onto their deist notion. But Hume demonstrated that this proved to be no less implausible from a truly scientific perspective. Hume had problematized this epistemological issue about the existence of God, trying to determine whether or not religious belief was supported by reason, and he arrived at a negative conclusion. Kant, who was largely sympathetic to Hume's criticisms but wanted to avoid the full implication of his conclusion, continued this enterprise.

Hegel read Hume from a very early period in his life. As a schoolboy he made excerpts from Hume's works for later study.³⁶ He refers to Hume a few times in his essay 'Faith and Knowledge'.³⁷ Hume's epistemology is discussed in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*.³⁸ Hegel refers to Hamann's book on Hume in his book review of Hamann's writings.³⁹ He dedicates a short section to Hume in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*,⁴⁰ where he refers to a couple of Hume's other works but not to the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. But nonetheless it is clear that he is fully aware of the implications of Hume's views on religion based on the works that he is familiar with. He explains, 'Hume ... then extended his skepticism to the conceptions and doctrines of freedom and necessity, and to the proofs of the existence of God.'⁴¹ Hegel summarizes Hume's position as follows: 'What is said to be metaphysically established regarding

³⁵ Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, p. 100; *Dialogues* (1779), p. 106.

³⁶ See Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*, p. 14; see also p. 47.

³⁷ Hegel, *Faith & Knowledge*, p. 69, pp. 99–100, p. 137, p. 154; *Jub.*, vol. 1, p. 297; pp. 330–1; p. 374; p. 393.

³⁸ Hegel, *EL*, § 39, § 40, § 47, § 50, § 53; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 122, p. 123, p. 137, p. 145, p. 152.

³⁹ Hegel, *Hamann*, p. 49, p. 50n; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 268, p. 270n.

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 369–75; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 493–500.

⁴¹ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 374; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 499.

immortality, God, nature etc. lacks a real ground, such as is professed to be given; for the inferences on which men ground their proofs are subjectively formed conceptions.⁴² Hegel sees Hume primarily as a skeptic, and for this reason the main focus of his analysis is on Hume's epistemology. In his general narrative of the history of philosophy, Hegel regards Hume's main role as that of preparing the way for Kant.⁴³ In Hegel's eyes, this kind of skepticism is an example of the religious retreat of the times, and for this reason he is rather dismissive of its ultimate value philosophically. He finds especially problematic Hume's focus on the irrational passions and desires and his failure to see any meaningful foundation for human reason and knowing. While Hegel also has his criticisms of Kant, he nonetheless appreciates his attempt to go beyond Hume and to find another way to ground religion that, on the one hand, is not vulnerable to the kinds of skeptical criticisms that Hume issues and, on the other hand, does justice to our religious intuitions.

2.3 Kant: The Limits of Reason and the Moral Foundation of Religion

Particularly influential for Kant was Hume's dilemma that all of our knowledge comes from experience, but yet we have no experience of God, Creation, or other such things. Hume has Philo respond to Cleanthes, 'Our ideas reach no farther than our experience: We have no experience of divine attributes and operations: I need not conclude my syllogism: You can draw the inference yourself.'⁴⁴ Kant found himself compelled to accept the implied conclusion that we can have no knowledge of God since all such knowledge lies outside our experience.

Kant believed that much of the confusion surrounding religion comes from ungrounded assertions about the objects of religion that transcend the bounds of human reason. In other words, people claim to know or to have demonstrated things that lie outside the sphere of what is accessible by means of the human cognitive faculties. Although he believes that this is a quite natural way of thinking, it is nonetheless erroneous. Kant was convinced that the problem with all previous systems of metaphysics was their failure to recognize the limits of the

⁴² Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 374; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 499.

⁴³ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 369; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 493: 'We must add to what has preceded an account of the skepticism of Hume, which has been given a more important place in history than it deserves from its intrinsic nature; its historic importance is due to the fact that Kant really derives the starting point of his philosophy in Hume.' *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 374; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 498–9: 'Hume thus declared this sort of universality, as he declared necessity, to be rather subjectively than objectively existent; for custom is just a subjective universality of this kind. This is an important and acute observation in relation to experience looked at as the source of knowledge; and it is from this point that the Kantian reflection now begins.' *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 375; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 500: 'in German philosophy ... we have to recognize in Kant another opposing force to that of Hume.'

⁴⁴ Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pp. 44–5; *Dialogues* (1779), p. 24.

human cognitive capacity and their uncritical assumption of reason's access to the objects of metaphysics. Therefore, Kant attempted to demonstrate the limits of reason by critically examining the faculties of the human mind. Only when this was established would it be possible to ascertain what could be truly known. He argued that only those things that were given in representation were possible objects of knowledge. By contrast, those things that were not possible representations could not be known and remained forever cut off from us. These included God, immortality, and freedom, which could not be demonstrated since they transcended the sphere of experience.⁴⁵ The point of this critique of reason was, he claimed, 'to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*'.⁴⁶ By knowing the limits of human reason, one could then properly identify what lay beyond its purview and was thus the proper object of religious belief.

With this approach Kant created a dualism of phenomena and noumena, representation and thing-in-itself. The former were things that could be objects of possible experience and could thus be known, while the latter were objects not of possible experience but only of thought. We can think of things as they are in themselves, that is, apart from our ways of perceiving them, but we can never know them as such. According to this scheme, the divine clearly falls on the side of the noumena. All attempts to gain knowledge of God by means of empirical experience are thus doomed to failure since such attempts always invoke something that transcends experience and thus that is impossible to know. Given that God is not a representation or object of experience, Kant argued that from a metaphysical point of view God is unknowable. If God cannot be known since He lies outside all possible experience, then He quickly becomes posited as dwelling in an unknown transcendent sphere inaccessible to the human mind.⁴⁷

Like Hume, Kant thus devotes much energy to analysing and refuting the traditional proofs for the existence of God, which he takes to be characteristic of this error. He explores specifically the ontological argument, the cosmological argument and, in his language, the physicotheological argument (*sc.* the argument

⁴⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, pp. 116–17. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch 1781, 2nd ed. 1787, B xxix–xxx. For Kant's account of religion, see Peter Byrne, *Kant on God*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2007. Gordon E. Michalson, *Kant and the Problem of God*, Oxford: Blackwell 1999. Chris L. Firestone, *Kant and Theology at the Boundaries of Reason*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2009. Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Rational Theology*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1978. Allen W. Wood, *Kant's Moral Religion*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 1970. Norman Kemp Smith, *Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International 1992 [1918], pp. 522–42. Karl Barth, 'Kant' in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Brian Cozens and John Bowden, London: SCM Press 2001, pp. 252–98. James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 1997, pp. 203–34.

⁴⁶ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 117; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B xxx.

⁴⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 88; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 7.

from design).⁴⁸ His treatment of these arguments was of keen interest to Hegel.⁴⁹ Kant examines these famous proofs in detail and shows how in each case a move is made that goes beyond what is warranted by reason. The ontological argument claims to demonstrate its conclusion a priori, based solely on the concept of God, while the cosmological and physicotheological arguments claim, each in their own way, to be grounded in experience and thus to be more in tune with the modern empirical sciences. Despite their use of different approaches, these arguments all fail in the end. Every time it turns out that reason 'spreads its wings in vain when seeking to rise above the world of sense through the mere might of speculation'.⁵⁰ While the three branches of theology that correspond to these arguments—ontotheology, cosmotheology, and physicotheology—can give us some insight into the *concept* of God, they cannot prove anything about the actual *existence* of God. From this analysis Kant concludes that there can be no *knowledge* of God. In short, he writes, 'Now I assert that all attempts of a merely speculative use of reason in regard to theology are entirely fruitless and by their internal constitution null and nugatory, but that the principles of reason's natural use do not lead at all to any theology.'⁵¹

But Kant believes that, although this is a negative conclusion, it nonetheless can serve an important function since the critical examination of reason has led to a better understanding of both how errors arise and where the limits of the human cognitive faculties are to be found. With this investigation into the nature of the human mind we are now better able to be on guard against specious arguments that claim to demonstrate the existence of metaphysical objects that they can never justify.⁵² Kant takes himself to have performed the beneficial service of helping us to reign in enthusiastic and misguided attempts to demonstrate the existence of God and other metaphysical concepts.

⁴⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 495–524; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 584/B612–A630/B658. See also Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, ed. and trans. by Allen W. Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1996, pp. 358–405. *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre in Kants gesammelte Schriften*, vols 1–29, (Part 1, *Werke*, vols 1–9 (1902–23), Part 2, *Briefwechsel*, vols 10–13 (1900–22), Part 3, *Handschriftlicher Nachlass*, vols 14–23 (1911–55), Part 4, *Vorlesungen*, vols 24–29 (1966ff.)), ed. by the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences, Berlin: Georg Reimer and Walter de Gruyter 1900ff., vol. 28, pp. 993–1126.

⁴⁹ See Hegel's lecture course on this subject: *Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God*, ed. and trans. by Peter C. Hodgson, Oxford: Clarendon Press 2007 (*Vorlesungen über die Beweise Daseyn Gottes und Zum kosmologischen Gottesbeweis*, ed. by Walter Jaeschke, in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 18, *Vorlesungsmanuskripte II (1816–1831)*, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1995). See also *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 452–7; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 583–8. *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 67–73; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 6–12. *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 173–84; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 108–19. *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 351–7; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 271–6. *EL*, § 51; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 149–51.

⁵⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 563; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 591/B 619.

⁵¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 586; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 636/B 664.

⁵² Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 588; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 640/B 668: 'despite all of its inadequacies, transcendental theology retains an important negative use, and is a constant censor of our reason when it has to do merely with pure ideas.'

At first glance this would seem to be a radical conclusion that would put him immediately on the side of the skeptics and critics of religion. But he hastens to add that this is not the case. If we suppose that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated, 'would we then have to give up the cognition of God? Not at all; for then we would only lack the knowledge that God exists, but a great field would still be open to us, and this would be the belief or faith that God exists.'⁵³ At first glance this claim sounds utterly untenable since the negative conclusion that Kant reached seems without a doubt to be damaging to the cause of those wishing to advance a traditional conception of God. Kant's counterintuitive claim is that not everything hangs on demonstrating conclusively the existence of God. There is, he suggests, another approach.

Kant claimed that there are two kinds of reason: speculative (or theoretical) and practical. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he began by discussing the former, and this is what led to the negative conclusion. But he points out that another unexplored option remains open, namely, practical reason. It is with this move from speculative to practical reason that he wishes to transform his negative conclusions into something positive. In short, he wants to argue that the ground of this faith comes not from theoretical reason but from the sphere of the practical: ethics. He reasons:

This faith we will derive *a priori* from moral principles. Hence if in what follows we provoke doubt about these speculative proofs and take issue with the supposed demonstrations of God's existence, we will not thereby undermine faith in God; but rather we will clear the way for practical proofs. We are merely throwing out the false presumptions of human reason when it tries from itself to demonstrate the existence of God with apodictic certainty; from moral principles, however, we will accept a faith in God as a principle of every religion.⁵⁴

His criticisms of the traditional arguments for the existence of God, Kant thinks, should not be cause for alarm. There is no reason to regard them as undermining faith or posing a threat to religion. On the contrary, Kant has, he believes, performed an important service by showing that it would be ill advised to pin one's faith on the validity of such arguments. Kant's approach here is reminiscent of that of Lessing in the latter's defence of the Reimarus fragments. While Lessing wanted to grant the truth of the critical claims that the fragments made about the Bible and that people found so disturbing and offensive, he nonetheless wanted to present himself in the role of the defender of Christianity. Similarly, while Kant

⁵³ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 355; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1010.

⁵⁴ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 355; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1010.

wants to side with the critics and skeptics of religion (albeit for his own reasons) with respect to the issue of the proofs for God's existence, he nonetheless also wants to claim that he can find a support for religion elsewhere.

While theoretical reason has lost the battle to the skeptics, practical reason is the sphere that can rescue religion. Kant believes that it is upon this basis that religion must be built.⁵⁵ He portrays this moral basis for religion as being the rock-solid foundation that is needed in the face of the criticism that religion has been exposed to in the Enlightenment. This escapes the criticisms since it is not based on the traditional proofs. The moral theist is only too glad to grant that the criticisms of these proofs are perfectly valid and correct. His position is in no way threatened by this since it does not depend on the truth of these proofs.⁵⁶ This approach is immune to the criticisms since it is not based on theoretical knowledge that can be undermined.

Kant's attempt to save the belief in God can perhaps most concisely be understood in terms of his doctrine of the so-called postulates of practical reason.⁵⁷ Kant argued that although we cannot *know* or demonstrate the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, or human freedom with our reason, we must nevertheless presuppose them as 'postulates' since we need these beliefs for ethics. In short, in order for ethics to make sense, we are obliged to assume these things. Thus what was lost in the sphere of theoretical philosophy is won again in practical philosophy.

With regard to the postulate of freedom, it is obvious that for morality to make sense we must be free. It must be possible for us to use our reason to determine what is ethically right and to use our will to act on that conviction. If it were the case that we were wholly determined by the cause-and-effect network of things in

⁵⁵ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* in *Religion and Rational Theology*, pp. 355–6; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, pp. 1010–11: 'Moral theism is of course critical, since it pursues all the speculative proofs for the existence of God step by step, and recognizes them to be insufficient; indeed, the moral theist asserts absolutely that it is impossible for speculative reason to demonstrate the existence of such a being with apodictic certainty; but he is nevertheless firmly convinced of the existence of this being, and he has a faith beyond all doubt on practical grounds. The foundation on which he builds his faith is unshakeable and it can never be overthrown, not even if all human beings united to undermine it. It is a fortress in which the moral human being can find refuge with no fear of ever being driven from it, because every attack on it will come to nothing. Hence his faith in God built on this foundation is as certain as a mathematical demonstration. This foundation is morals, the whole system of duties, which is cognized *a priori* with apodictic certainty through pure reason.'

⁵⁶ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 357; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1012: 'he thereby renders superfluous everything that the skeptical atheist attacks. For he needs no speculative proofs of the existence of God; he is convinced of it with certainty, because otherwise he would have to reject the necessary laws of morality which are grounded in the nature of his being.'

⁵⁷ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by Lewis White Beck, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1956, pp. 126ff. *Critik der praktischen Vernunft*, Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch 1788, pp. 219ff. See also *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 673; *Critik der reinen Vernunft*, A 798/B 826: 'The final aim to which in the end the speculation of reason in its transcendental use is directed concerns three objects: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God.'

our environment, then we would in some sense not be free to decide on our actions. We would be, for Kant, like animals that simply act on their immediate drives and inclinations in a mechanistic manner. The postulate of freedom 'comes from the necessary presupposition of independence from the world of sense and of the capacity of determining man's will by the law of an intelligible world, that is, the law of freedom itself'.⁵⁸ It only makes sense to talk about ethics if we are able to escape these natural influences and will the good in itself independently of what our passions and drives would otherwise have us do. If we were not free to act morally, then any kind of ascription of rewards or punishments would be mistaken. For this reason we do not regard animals as morally praiseworthy or culpable. The epistemological problem lies in the fact that we experience the world of sense in which we in fact are bound up in a network of natural cause-and-effect relations. We do not experience the world in which we are wholly free of these things. This is only an idea that we can think, an 'intelligible world', that can never be confirmed by sense experience, which is always governed by cause-and-effect relations. Thus, Kant argues, although we cannot demonstrate this transcendental freedom, we must postulate it since otherwise the whole concept of acting ethically would be absurd.

The postulate of the existence of God,⁵⁹ which is closely bound up with the postulate of human immortality, is likewise dictated by the demands of ethics. The goal of our actions is happiness. For our ethical world to make sense we must believe that there is a correspondence between our ethical actions and the happiness that we make ourselves worthy of by acting in accordance with the moral law. We are acutely aware that we, as finite human beings, are unable to create such a world where virtue and happiness coincide, and so it is natural to postulate the idea of God as the entity which creates and rules the universe in this fashion. Thus we must believe that there exists a supreme being which has fashioned the universe such that happiness and ethical action are in perfect harmony. The postulate of the existence of God thus arises from the idea of what Kant calls 'the highest good'.⁶⁰ In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he defines this as follows: 'I call the idea of such an intelligence, in which the morally most perfect will, combined with the highest blessedness, is the cause of all happiness in the world, insofar as it stands in exact relation with morality (as the worthiness to be happy), *the ideal of the highest good*.'⁶¹ There must be some agent that brings about a correspondence between happiness and virtuous action. Kant explains: 'Hence the duties or morality are apodictically certain, since they are set before me by my own reason; but there would be no incentives to act in accord with these duties as a rational

⁵⁸ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 137; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, pp. 238–9.

⁵⁹ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 128–36; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, pp. 223–37.

⁶⁰ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 128ff.; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, pp. 223ff.

⁶¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 680; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 810/B 838.

human being if there were no God and no future world.⁶² Our motivation for acting ethically is the belief that there is such a being who has the ability to reward us for our virtuous actions.⁶³ It would be impossible to make sense of ethical motivation if such an entity did not exist. While we might appreciate the idea of moral laws, without the existence of God to motivate us to follow them, we would hardly be inclined to undertake the strenuous work required to act ethically (and contrary to our own drives and impulses).⁶⁴ Without God, the moral laws would become 'empty figments of the brain' with no binding authority.⁶⁵ Kant clearly believes that anyone who does not assume the existence of God cannot help but be morally reprobate.⁶⁶ It is quite simply impossible, Kant thinks, to deny this postulate and still maintain any meaningful conception of ethics. But as we learned from the criticism of the proofs for the existence of God, we never experience the divine in the world of sense, and thus we cannot confirm with certainty the existence of such an entity. However, from the moral perspective we find ourselves obliged to postulate the existence of God since otherwise ethics would not be possible.

The third and final postulate, namely, that of immortality or a future life follows immediately from the foregoing.⁶⁷ On the assumption that there is a God who has created a universe based on rational and just ethical principles, we must assume that such a deity has provided for a system of rewards in accordance with the behaviour of rational agents. Kant also claims that the promise of immortality is necessary to give humans an incentive to act morally. Humans should act according to the universal laws of reason:

But if in the case of a creature who has conducted himself according to these eternal and immediate laws of nature and who has thus become worthy of

⁶² Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 407; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1073.

⁶³ It should be noted that this is an ambiguous and controversial point in Kant. At the time that Kant wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he seems clearly to have regarded the idea of the promise of immortality and eternal happiness (as created by God or the highest good) as being the key motivation for ethical action. However, he later came to realize that this motivation would undermine the purity of the will, that is, to will the good for its own sake. He then subsequently revised this view in order to resolve this conflict. The degree to which his attempts to remedy the problem were successful in this regard is unclear.

⁶⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 681; *Critik der reinen Vernunft*, A 813/B 841: 'Thus without a God ... the majestic ideas of morality are, to be sure, objects of approbation and admiration, but not incentives for resolve and realization.'

⁶⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 680; *Critik der reinen Vernunft*, A 811/B 839.

⁶⁶ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 407; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1072: 'Why should I make myself worthy of happiness through morality if there is no being who can give me this happiness? Hence without God I would have to be either a visionary or a scoundrel. I would have to deny my own nature and its eternal moral laws; I would have to cease to be a rational human being. Hence the existence of God is ... a necessary postulate for the inconvertible laws of my own nature.'

⁶⁷ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, pp. 126–8; *Critik der praktischen Vernunft*, pp. 219–23.

happiness, no state can be hoped for where he participates in this happiness; if no state of well-being thus follows his well-doing; then there would be a contradiction between morality and the course of nature.⁶⁸

It is clear that in our world the morally righteous are not always rewarded and the morally wicked not always punished. Thus, the only assumption that can be made is that these rewards and punishments do not take place in this world:

But then there must exist a being *who rules the world according to reason and moral laws*, and who has established, in the course of things to come, a state where the creature who has remained true to his nature and who has made himself worthy of happiness through morality will actually participate in this happiness; *for otherwise all subjectively necessary duties which I as a rational being am responsible for performing will lose their objective reality.*⁶⁹

We must thus assume that there exists such a state of happiness that is our reward for the performance of our ethical duties, even though we do not see any evidence for it empirically in the world around us.

In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant adds another argument for the necessary assumption of immortality. It would be absurd to think that ethics demands of us something that is impossible. For an ethical command of an 'ought' to make sense, one must presume a 'can'. The goal of the ethical agent is to purge oneself of one's natural desires and to act solely in accordance with the good. But since we are corporeal creatures who inhabit the world of sense, it is impossible for us ever to reach this state of moral perfection in our mundane existence.⁷⁰ In our moral striving we make infinite progress towards this state of perfection, but it can never be achieved in the empirical world that we inhabit. It follows from this that there must be some other world beyond the empirical in which we will continue and complete this moral development. Kant explains: 'This infinite progress is possible . . . only under the presupposition of an infinitely enduring existence and personality of the same rational being; this is called the immortality of the soul.'⁷¹

⁶⁸ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 406; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1072.

⁶⁹ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 407; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1072. See also *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 680; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 811/B 839: 'Now since we must necessarily represent ourselves through reason as belonging to such a world [sc. an intelligible moral world], although the senses do not present us with anything except a world of appearances, we must assume the moral world to be a consequence of our conduct in the sensible world; and since the latter does not offer such a connection to us, we must assume the former to be a world that is future for us.'

⁷⁰ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 126; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, p. 220: 'But complete fitness of the will to the moral law is holiness which is a perfection of which no rational being in the world of sense is at any time capable.'

⁷¹ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 127; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, p. 220.

The postulate of immortality thus 'derives from the practically necessary condition of a duration adequate to the perfect fulfillment of the moral law'.⁷² It is necessary for us to assume that there is another sphere, beyond this one, in which we can continue our efforts towards moral improvement. This is the assurance of our enduring existence beyond death. Thus, the immortality of the individual is established as a condition for ethics.

Kant's claim about the postulates was subtle since it was not immediately easy to see what their actual epistemological status was especially vis-à-vis the claims of speculative reason that he was so quick to refute. He explains by way of summary:

At the conclusion of moral theology it should be remarked that the three articles of moral faith, *God, freedom of the human will, and a moral world*, are the only articles in which it is permissible for us to transport ourselves in thought beyond all possible experience and out of the sensible world; only here may we assume and believe something from a practical point of view for which we otherwise have no adequate speculative grounds.⁷³

These are three points that are necessary to postulate with respect to ethics, but we should not imagine that they are established as facts in the way that theoretical reason would like. It is not a question of 'demonstrated dogma' but rather of postulates.⁷⁴ Even though these postulates are not a matter of 'knowing' and not demonstrations of the existence of these things, Kant believes that all rational beings are obliged to accept them. He argues: 'This moral faith is a practical postulate, in that anyone who denies it is brought *ad absurdum practicum*. An *absurdum logicum* is an absurdity in judgments; but there is an *absurdum practicum* when it is shown that anyone who denies this or that would have to be a scoundrel.'⁷⁵ Those who fail to accept the truth of the postulates end in an absurdity, namely, that they can make no sense of the world of ethics. On pain of contradiction, even the skeptics are obliged to accept this reasoning lest they forfeit ethics.

Kant's solution to the problem created by the skepticism about the proofs of the existence of God was not satisfying to traditionalists. Kant consigned religion to a mere support for ethics and undermined its foundation as a body of knowledge or as something knowable. For this reason Kant fell into disfavour with the religious authorities, and his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* was regarded as a

⁷² Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 137; *Critik der praktischen Vernunft*, p. 238.

⁷³ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 421; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1091.

⁷⁴ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 684; *Critik der reinen Vernunft*, A 818/B 846.

⁷⁵ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 415; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1083.

potentially dangerous book. The traditionalists believed that there was much more to religion and Christianity than simply ethics, even though this may be an important part of it. Kant's efforts can be seen as an attempt to reconcile the split between reason and religion that arose during the Enlightenment.

By shifting the emphasis from traditional religious doctrine to ethics, Kant brings to a head the general movement during the Enlightenment, which can also be seen in the works of thinkers such as Voltaire and Lessing. There was a gradual sheering away of specific Christian dogmas as they were exposed one by one to overwhelming criticism. Moreover, for figures such as Voltaire the key source of religious wars and disputes was the individual points of doctrine which separated the different religions and sects of Christianity. These thinkers saw the solution to these problems in shifting the emphasis from the question of the veracity of the individual dogmas to the practical ability of religion to improve the behaviour and moral character of human beings. As Lessing illustrates with the image of the ring in *Nathan the Wise*, the truth of religion is not something abstract or theoretical but rather lies in the way in which it can encourage people to become more moral. Kant echoes this view:

What interest does reason have in this cognition [sc. of God]? No speculative interest, but a practical one. The object is much too sublime for us to be able to speculate about it. In fact we can be led into error by speculation. But our morality has need of the idea of God to give it emphasis. Thus it should not make us more learned, but better, wiser and more upright.⁷⁶

With regard to dogmatics, this means that Kant has in effect reduced Christianity to the belief in the existence of God and the immortality of the soul and seems to have no use for key Christian dogmas such as the Incarnation, the Revelation, and the Trinity. But if the matter has been reduced to only the two dogmas, then it is not clear that what remains is uniquely characteristic of Christianity as such, since other religions such as Islam share these same two dogmas.

This solution was problematic for many thinkers who were otherwise sympathetic to Kant's critical enterprise. To many it seemed that Kant had decisively demonstrated the fruitless nature of metaphysical speculation about the divine. However, they saw that his attempt to salvage the situation and escape the apparently agnostic conclusion by means of a postulate of practical reason was unsatisfying since it simply reduced God to a moral principle or, even worse, a presupposition for one. In his lectures, Kant's definition of the key terms makes this clear. He begins uncontroversially by defining theology as 'the system of our

⁷⁶ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion* in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 343; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 996.

cognition of the highest being'.⁷⁷ But then he goes on to define 'religion' in general as 'the application of theology to morality, that is, to good disposition and to a course of conduct well-pleasing to the highest being'.⁷⁸ Kant thus indicates that religion is ultimately a matter of ethics. Although he presents this definition as if it were entirely intuitive and unproblematic, it is, needless to say, profoundly controversial since while religion, to be sure, has an ethical aspect, there is much more to it than this.

Kant, indeed, seems to admit that he has reduced religion to a bare minimum, for in his lectures he begins by trying to establish only as much theology as is necessary. Since the problems arise when people make claims about the divine that go beyond what is warranted by reason, Kant wishes to begin in a minimalist fashion and explore what can be known for certain. Even if this is not very much, it would be better to start with this small part which is certain rather than with something larger that rests on an unstable foundation. Kant's conclusion is that the minimum of theology is simply to 'see that my concept of God is *possible* and that it does not contradict the laws of the understanding ... Provided that this alone is made a ground, there can always be a religion.'⁷⁹ One cannot prove the existence of God, but the atheist cannot disprove it.⁸⁰ So with regard to the epistemological question alone, neither side has the advantage. But by shifting the focus to ethics, Kant attempts to give the edge to the believers. They need to postulate the notion of a just God in order to make sense of morality. Thus they do not base their belief in God on proofs of theoretical reason nor do they claim with certainty to have established the truth of God's existence. Rather they simply posit the existence of such a being as a necessary postulate.

2.4 Hegel's Criticism of Kant

Hegel received his philosophical and theological education at a time when Kant's philosophy was the central object of discussion. There can be no doubt that Kant's understanding of religion was profoundly influential for him. It is often said that Hegel's so-called *Early Theological Writings* are fundamentally Kantian in spirit. But while the young Hegel was largely under Kant's sway with regard to questions

⁷⁷ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 342; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 995.

⁷⁸ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 344; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 997.

⁷⁹ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 345; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 998.

⁸⁰ Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion in Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 369; *Vorlesungen über die philosophische Religionslehre*, p. 1026.

of religion, the mature Hegel found much to criticize in Kant's approach.⁸¹ Hegel dedicates a section to Kant in his article 'Faith and Knowledge'.⁸² The sections 'Reason as Lawgiver' and 'Reason as Testing Laws', from the 'Spirit' chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* take up Kant's theory of ethics.⁸³ When he reworked the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* for the second edition in 1827, Hegel added a long section on Kant.⁸⁴ Finally, he dedicates an extended analysis to Kant in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.⁸⁵

Hegel believed that Kant had a profound insight with respect to his theory of representations and the necessary structures of the human mind. However, he was critical of the conclusions that Kant drew from this with respect to religion. Hegel expanded the notion of representations to include not just empirically perceived entities but all forms of thought and cognition, that is, all objects of consciousness. When things are seen in this manner, he claims, we can and indeed do have representations or conceptions of the divine. Indeed, every country and people have traditional beliefs about the divine that can be analysed and understood. Given this, it is absurd to argue that God dwells in an inaccessible sphere beyond our own and that we cannot know the divine. On the contrary, the collective human mind is full of stories and ideas about the divine. It is the task of the philosopher to make sense of them.⁸⁶

Hegel holds Kant responsible for the conclusion that many of the Enlightenment critics of religion reached, namely, that there can be no knowledge of God. Since Kant's epistemology claims that the only things that can be known are representations or objects of possible experience, God is placed in the transcendent sphere of the noumena or of objects that can be thought but not experienced. This means that, for Hegel, God is separated from all human

⁸¹ For accounts of Hegel's view of Kant's philosophy of religion, see Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. by J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1990, pp. 11ff. See Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, pp. 33–8.

⁸² Hegel, 'Glauben und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität, in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen, als Kantische, Jacobische und Fichtesche Philosophie,' *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, vol. 2, no. 1, 1802, pp. 1–188. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, vols 16–17 (1834–35) in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 16, pp. 3–157. In *Jub.*, vol. 1, pp. 277–433. (In English as *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. by Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris, Albany: State University of New York Press 1977.)

⁸³ Hegel, *PhS*, pp. 252–62; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 322–34.

⁸⁴ Hegel, *EL*, §§ 40–60; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 123–63.

⁸⁵ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 423–78; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 551–611.

⁸⁶ Some will argue that it is, on the contrary, the task of the theologian to make sense of them, but Hegel notes that since religion is a part of human culture that develops over time throughout history, it thus overlaps with any number of other developments in different cultural spheres, such as history, politics, philosophy, etc. For this reason expertise is required that goes beyond that of a theologian or specialist in religion. What is required is someone who can grasp the wider movement of Spirit in the entire cultural sphere and then understand the religious phenomena in this sphere.

knowing and activity. He regards it as a great prejudice of the day that 'spirit... can have commerce only with phenomena and finite objects.'⁸⁷ This is merely an echo of the Enlightenment's firm belief in the final and absolute truth of the natural sciences. What is true is what can be known through the senses, that is, what is empirically perceived. Since God is not an object of sense perception, the result is that the conception of God becomes empty and abstract, which was the conception of God that was found in Deism. God simply becomes a kind of placeholder or shorthand form for what cannot be known.⁸⁸ But Hegel points out that this contradicts the basic Christian doctrine of Revelation. God revealed Himself to human beings in order that He could be known to them. Hegel argues, 'If religion declares that man's glory and salvation lie in his knowing God and that religion's service to man consists in having imparted to him this knowledge and in having revealed the unknown nature of God, then this philosophy forms the most monstrous antithesis to religion.'⁸⁹

Hegel claims that one of the main shortcomings of Kant's philosophy is its insistent dualism between thought and being. This can be seen clearly in Kant's critical treatment of the ontological argument. This argument wishes to claim that from God's very nature as the most perfect being, one can infer His existence. For if God had all the other perfections but yet failed to exist, then this would be a defect, and one could imagine another entity with all the other perfections and that *did* exist. Such a being would be higher than God, but this is clearly absurd. Thus God must exist if one grants that He is the most perfect being. According to Kant's famous criticism, this argument confuses things since being is not a real predicate that adds additional information. Kant uses the example of a hundred imaginary dollars and a hundred real dollars.⁹⁰ He points out that in the concept there is no difference between these two; the one hundred real dollars do not contain more money than the one hundred imaginary ones. Conceptually they are identical. Therefore, he concludes that the existence of the hundred real dollars is something distinct from its concept, and something that can only be known by means of empirical verification.

Hegel, of course, grants that there is a difference between something real and something imagined, but he argues that it is Kant who has confused things by

⁸⁷ Hegel, *MW*, p. 345; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 15.

⁸⁸ This is 'the void of the atomistic philosophy, God deprived of all definite character, predicates and properties, lifted into a *beyond* where we cannot know Him, or rather reduced to an abstraction void of all content.' Hegel, *MW*, p. 344; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 14.

⁸⁹ Hegel, *MW*, p. 345; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 15. See also Hegel, 'Aphorismen über Nichtwissen und absolutes Wissen im Verhältnisse zur christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis. —Ein Beitrag zum Verständnisse der Philosophie unserer Zeit. Von Carl Friederich G... . I.—Berlin, bei E. Franklin. 1829,' *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, 1829, nos 99–102, pp. 789–816; nos 105–6, pp. 833–5; see p. 797. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, vols 16–17 (1834–35) in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 17, pp. 111–48, see p. 121. (In English as 'Review of K. F. Göschel's *Aphorisms*,' in *MW*, pp. 401–29, see p. 410; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 276–313, see p. 286.)

⁹⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 567; *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A 599/B 627.

radically separating thought and being. He argues that the correct conception of truth is one that sees a fluid relation between ideas and their realization in the world. Of course, one cannot gain a hundred dollars merely by imagining it, but this is not to say that one cannot actualize this idea. Indeed, one can and one does actualize this kind of thing all the time:

One possesses a hundred dollars when they are real only; if a man has therefore so great a desire to possess a hundred dollars, he must put his hand to work in order to attain them, i.e., he must not come to a standstill at the imagination of them, but pass out beyond it. This subjective side is not the ultimate or the absolute; the true is that which is not merely subjective.⁹¹

Here Hegel implicitly draws on his own theory of truth, which involves an idea or a universal that becomes real or actual. Something that remains merely abstract is an empty conception of truth. Instead, the truth is something that is a dynamic movement containing both elements, a universal side that is thought and a particular side that is actualized in the world of sense. It is a mistaken and empty view that allows things to remain abstract and never be actualized: 'every action aims at setting aside a subjective conception and making it into something objective. There is no man so foolish as that philosophy [sc. of Kant]; when a man feels hungry, he does not call up the imagination of food, but sets about satisfying his hunger. All activity is a conception which does not yet exist, but whose subjectivity is abrogated.'⁹² It thus lies in the very nature of thought to be realized and actualized,⁹³ and to insist on merely a one-sided abstraction, as Kant's philosophy does, is a misunderstanding. With regard to the theological aspect, Hegel has in mind the Christian notion of Christ as God revealed in space and time. Hegel is critical of, for example, Judaism or Islam for maintaining an abstract conception of God which is not, as it were, actualized in the world.

According to Hegel, the same problem affects Kant's conception of immortality. Since we can never fully eliminate our sensuous desires and inclinations in this world, we must have the opportunity to perfect our moral character indefinitely in the future, and from this we can infer that we are immortal. Hegel claims that this is a highly unsatisfactory conception of ethics since it implies that ethical behaviour can never ultimately be realized in the real world:

⁹¹ See Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 453; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 584. See also Hegel, *EL*, § 51; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 149–51.

⁹² Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 453–4; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 585.

⁹³ See Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 454; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 585: 'Thought, the notion, of necessity implies that the Notion does not remain subjective; this subjective is on the contrary abrogated and reveals itself as objective.'

Perfected morality must remain a beyond; for morality presupposes the difference of the particular and universal will. It is a struggle, the determination of the sensuous by the universal; the struggle can only take place when the sensuous will is not yet in conformity with the universal. The result is, therefore, that the aim of the moral will is to be attained in infinite progress only; on this Kant founds ... the postulate of the immortality of the soul, as the endless progress of the subject in his morality, because morality itself is incomplete and must advance into infinitude.⁹⁴

This conception of a morality that can never be achieved is for Hegel an absurdity. While the will, as in children, for example, is initially dominated by drives and inclinations, it is trained through education and upbringing in order to conform to the universal. To claim that morality has nothing to do with what is sensuous is to claim that there can be no actual morality since in order to exist, it must be in the realm of sense, of particularity. To demand moral perfection is to eliminate real morality, which requires the sensuous in order to actually exist.⁹⁵ Again Kant has radically and needlessly separated the universal or thought from the particular, being. The same problem appears with Kant's argument that one must presuppose a highest good, a divine being that ensures that virtuous actions are in the end rewarded, despite all appearances to the contrary in the actual world.⁹⁶ This God and this conception of divine justice dwell solely in the abstract beyond. Since they are never known or realized in the real world, Hegel claims that they remain only a subjective opinion with no objective truth.⁹⁷

Ultimately, Kant's conception of the divine like his conception of the good remains abstract. It is relegated to a sphere beyond what is real and then this is touted as the highest. But, for Hegel, this is an impoverished sphere and a poor truth if it can never be actualized. According to his view, the truth contains an abstract or universal element, to be sure, but it must also realize itself and be in contact with the realm of particularity. Without this step, one remains in a stagnant dualism, forever cut off from the divine. This renders a conception of God about which we can know nothing, a view which Hegel takes to be unchristian. He argues for this with a reference to Paul's attempt to convert the Athenians.⁹⁸ Referring to the altar of the unknown god in Athens, Paul explains that God has revealed Himself and can be known (Acts 17:16–34). This is the

⁹⁴ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 461; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 593.

⁹⁵ See Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 463; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 595: 'the immortality of the soul is postulated on account of imperfect morality, i.e., because it is infected with sensuousness. But the sensuousness is implied in moral self-consciousness; the end, perfection, is what really destroys morality as such.'

⁹⁶ See Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 462; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 594.

⁹⁷ See Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 463; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 595.

⁹⁸ See Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 475; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 608. See also Hegel, *EL*, § 73; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 179.

conception of God that one finds in Christianity. The postulated God of Kant hearkens back to the unknown god of the Greeks.

2.5 Hegel and the Enlightenment

Hegel's philosophy of religion can be seen as a critical response to the various theories issuing from the Enlightenment. Indeed, at the end of his lectures, he identifies the Enlightenment explicitly as one of the dominant trends in modern thinking that he wishes to refute.⁹⁹ Due to the numerous criticisms of different Christian doctrines in the Enlightenment, there was a general movement away from the traditional dogmas which were vulnerable to attack by science and critical reason. But the Enlightenment operates with a mistaken conception of religion when it tries to examine it as if it were an object for natural scientific observation. Religion concerns primarily different concepts of the divine and not concrete objects for empirical analysis. The Enlightenment thus imposes its own methodology and criteria for truth onto religion and finds it wanting. But, for Hegel, this represents a complete misunderstanding of religion.

Not only were these dogmas impossible to defend, but they were also, as Voltaire argued, the source of religious strife. As a result, Christianity in its traditional form was for the most part simply dropped for the sake of natural religion, which had far fewer dogmas to defend and which could be made, at least on the face of it, consistent with science and reason. Voltaire, Lessing, and others thought that religious tolerance would only be possible when people gave up the specifics of their religious beliefs and agreed to a more general conception of the divine that could span the different religions. The desired goal was thus to round off the decimals and let religious believers of different denominations live and let live in the realization that they all ultimately worshipped the same God.¹⁰⁰ But the result of this was an emptying of the religious content, which became more and more attenuated as one dogma after another was discarded. Hegel explicitly points out this issue of the Enlightenment's destruction of religious content.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 343; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 265.

¹⁰⁰ It should be noted that the lone voice in opposition to this general trend was Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), who in his *Jerusalem* (1783) argued that true religious toleration amounts not to smoothing over the differences but rather emphasizing and respecting them. See Moses Mendelssohn, *Jerusalem: oder über religiöse Macht und Judentum*, Berlin: Friedrich Maurer 1783. (English translation: *Jerusalem, or, On Religious Power and Judaism*, trans. by Allan Arkush, Hanover: University Press of New England 1983.)

¹⁰¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 346; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 268: 'The Enlightenment knows only of negation, of limit, of determinacy as such, and therefore does an absolute injustice to the content.' *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 347; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 269: 'The Enlightenment wants to have nothing further to do with the content, and therefore is highly displeased that philosophy, as conscious, methodical thinking, curbs the fancies, the caprice, and the contingency of thinking.'

But far from rendering religion harmless, as Voltaire believed, the removal of doctrinal difference only served to lead to new forms of fanaticism. In the absence of a generally recognized truth, individuals with authority or power at their disposal could erect some arbitrary religious truth claim and enforce it with arms. As a part of the anti-Catholic sentiment during the French Revolution, a new cult of the 'Goddess of Reason' was officially declared on 10 November 1793.¹⁰² While the celebration of this new cult took place in Notre Dame, Christian churches and images were ransacked and desecrated. Led by revolutionary figures such as Antoine-François Momoro (1756–94), Jacques Hébert (1757–94), Pierre-Gaspard Chaumette (1763–94), and Joseph Fouché (1759–1820), this movement was careful to avoid any detailed doctrinal system. It was defined rather in a negative way as a rejection of traditional religious belief in God and immortality. Positively, it amounted simply to a vague veneration of the ideals of the Enlightenment: science and reason.

This movement was, however, short-lived, and when Maximilien Robespierre (1758–94) came to power, he quickly set about persecuting it and sending its ringleaders to the guillotine. Instead, he proclaimed a new state religion, the Cult of the Supreme Being. This was a deist religion, which still wanted to preserve the notion of an abstract deity and a conception of immortality since it was believed that these notions were essential for social stability. The violence caused by the followers of the Cult of the Goddess of Reason seemed to demonstrate abundantly what people were capable of if they were not made to fear divine punishment for their immoral actions. Like the preceding movement, Robespierre publicly celebrated the Cult of the Supreme Being in grand fashion, but once again it was not to last. When Robespierre fell from power and was himself sent to the guillotine, the Cult of the Supreme Being disappeared with him.

For Hegel, this course of events is typical of what happens when religion abandons its content and strays too far to the side of the subjective. The vacuum of content will always be filled by some fanatical faction claiming to be in sole possession of the truth. This is the danger that arises in the wake of the Enlightenment and is developed further in the movement known as 'Romanticism'.

¹⁰² See François-Alphonse Aulard, *Le culte de la raison et le culte de l'Être suprême (1793–1794), Essai historique*, Paris: Félix Alcan 1892.

Romanticism: The Retreat to Subjectivity

A second major intellectual trend that was relevant for Hegel's considerations of religion was Romanticism. Although Romanticism is usually understood as a critical response to the Enlightenment, as will be shown in the following, it can in many ways be seen as a natural continuation of it. Hegel's time in Jena corresponded to that of the highpoint of the Jena Romantic movement, just as his time in Heidelberg corresponded to that of the Heidelberg Romantic movement, and due to this he knew personally the most famous figures of German Romanticism. He polemicalizes against different aspects of this movement in a number of works, for example, in the sections dedicated to 'the unhappy consciousness', 'the beautiful soul', 'virtue and the way of the world', and 'the spiritual animal kingdom' from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹ In § 140 of the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel attempts to set up a typology of the different forms of Romantic subjectivism.² In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he treats some of the leading figures of the German Romantic movement.³ Perhaps his most extended critical discussion with the Romantics is in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, where various forms of Romantic art are treated. Also relevant is Hegel's long book review of Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger's (1780–1819) posthumous writings.⁴ In his treatment of what he regards as the mistakes and confusions of the Romantics Hegel often tends to sketch general views without always identifying specific targets. Thus while one cannot in every case find direct references to the key

¹ See the chapters 'The Actualization of Rational Self-Consciousness through its own Activity' and 'Individuality which Takes Itself to be Real in and for Itself' from the 'Reason' Chapter (*PhS*, pp. 211–62; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 271–334) and 'Spirit that Is Certain of Itself. Morality' from the 'Spirit' Chapter (*PhS*, pp. 364–409; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 459–516).

² Hegel, *PR*, § 140, pp. 170–84; *Jub.*, vol. 7, pp. 205–23.

³ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 506–12; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 641–6.

⁴ Hegel, 'Über Solger's nachgelassene Schriften und Briefwechsel. Herausgegeben von Ludwig Tieck und Friedrich von Raumer. Erster Band 780 S. mit Vorr. XVI S. Zweiter Band 784 S. Leipzig, 1826,' *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, Erster Artikel (March 1828), nos 51–2, pp. 403–16, nos 53–4, pp. 417–28; Zweiter Artikel (June 1828), nos 105–6, pp. 838–48, nos 107–8, pp. 849–64, nos 109–10, pp. 865–70. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, I–II, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1834–35, vols 16–17 in *Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, vols 1–18, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1832–45, vol. 16 (1834) pp. 436–506. In *Jub.* vol. 20, pp. 132–202. In English in *MW*, pp. 354–400.

works of the Romantics in Hegel's polemics, there can be little doubt that he was aware of the main issues and figures that will be sketched in what follows.

It should be noted that the term 'Romanticism' is used in different ways and is a movement with many aspects.⁵ It is used here to refer specifically to the family of related positions that constitute the targets of Hegel's critique. Specifically, he regards the Romantics as relativists and subjectivists. They are, he claims, overly focused on the creative power of the individual and reject the truth of the external sphere. The reasons for this come from their reaction to the Enlightenment's criticism of religion, which forced them to retreat to the inward sphere of the self.

3.1 Rousseau: Conscience and the Pure Heart

A forerunner of the Romantic view of faith and subjectivity can be found in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78). The conception of religion that he puts in the mouth of the nameless Savoyard priest from Book IV of *Emile* (1762) can be seen as typical of the kinds of problems that Hegel sees with religion in his day.⁶ Rousseau intended the piece to be a defence of religion against its many detractors and thus was shocked when this part of the book produced such outrage that it was banned and publicly burned in Paris, and he found himself having to flee in order to escape arrest. The work evoked equal anger among Catholics and Protestants with the result that he was ultimately obliged to leave the Continent and take refuge with David Hume in Great Britain. It seemed that Rousseau's intended remedy was not a solution to the religious crisis of the age but rather a product of it.

Hegel's first biographer Karl Rosenkranz reports that the young Hegel read Rousseau as a schoolboy and was especially interested in *The Confessions*.⁷ Later Hegel and his fellow students in Tübingen were enthusiastic followers of Rousseau's political views and the French Revolution.⁸ Hegel's advocacy of Rousseau's opinions on politics brought him into conflict with his conservative father.⁹ One of his fellow students from the period recounts that while Hegel was not much interested in abstract metaphysics, his real hero was Rousseau, and in this context the book *Emile*

⁵ Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology*, ed. by Carl Braaten, London: SCM Press 1967, pp. 76–90.

⁶ Hegel refers to this work in *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 387; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 513. For secondary literature on Rousseau's views on religion, see Karl Barth, 'Rousseau' in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Brian Cozens and John Bowden, London: SCM Press 2001, pp. 160–219.

⁷ Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1844, p. 13.

⁸ Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*, pp. 28, 33, 34. See also H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development*, vol. 1, *Toward the Sunlight 1770–1801*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1972, p. 85.

⁹ Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*, p. 33.

is mentioned explicitly.¹⁰ During this time Hegel excerpted a letter from Rousseau about the founding of a theatre in Genf,¹¹ and this might have served as inspiration for his account of the beautiful soul in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel alludes to *Emile* in his 'Aphorisms from the Wastebook' during his Jena period.¹² One can truly say that the young Hegel was in a sense raised on the main texts of Rousseau. Later in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* he refers to *On the Social Contract*,¹³ and he possessed a copy of the first edition of this work in his personal library.¹⁴ He discusses *Emile* in the *Philosophy of Right*,¹⁵ and finally he refers to Rousseau in his book review of Hamann's writings.¹⁶ Thus, Rousseau clearly remained a lifelong interest for him.

In some of his works, such as the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* and *On the Social Contract*, Rousseau sketches his view of human beings in their original condition. In contrast to the negatively conceived state of nature characterized by Hobbes as the war 'of every man against every man',¹⁷ Rousseau presents an irenic and tranquil existence prior to the foundation of states and political groupings. While most theorists of his age wished to glorify the achievements of culture and society that had allegedly raised human beings out of their former barbarous condition, Rousseau regards this development in just the opposite way. Far from leading people toward truth, virtue, and enlightenment, modern society corrupts them with greed, envy, ambition, and a host of other vices. Civilized life distorts our true instincts and destroys our original carefree existence. Human beings were virtuous in their natural original condition, and the development of human culture has simply been an ever-worsening perversion of this condition. This basic view plays a role in Rousseau's conception of religion. He regards organized religion as something artificial, secondary, and corrupt vis-à-vis the true basic religious sentiment that lies in the heart of all human beings. For Rousseau, humans in the state of nature could enjoy a dignified and worthy relationship to the divine even without any church or organized doctrine.

In *Emile* the Savoyard priest rejects all forms of academic philosophy and theology. These learned disputes are mere sophistry that lead to no conclusion.

¹⁰ Hegel in *Berichten seiner Zeitgenossen*, ed. by Günther Nicolin, Hamburg: Felix Meiner 1970, p. 12.

¹¹ Hegel, 'Rousseau à M. D'Alembert,' *Dokumente*, pp. 174–5; see also the editorial note to this text (p. 446).

¹² Hegel, 'Aphorisms from the Wastebook,' *MW*, p. 246; *Dokumente*, pp. 356–7.

¹³ Hegel, *EL*, § 163, Addition 1; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 360.

¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social, ou Principes du droit politique*, Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey 1762 (*Hegel's Library*, 1189).

¹⁵ Hegel, *PR*, § 153, Addition; *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 235. See also *PR*, § 258; *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 330.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Hamann*, p. 5; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 206.

¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by C. B. MacPherson, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1968, Part 1, Chapter 13, p. 185. See also *De Cive or The Citizen*, ed. by Sterling P. Lamprecht, New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts 1949, Preface, p. 13.

They are the products of a corrupt and arrogant modern culture. He argues that it would be absurd to think that true religious belief can rest upon a position that has been reached after years of laborious study. If this were the case, then every conscientious individual would have to devote his or her life to studying the different religions to determine where the truth really lies, but this would simply be unfeasible.¹⁸ Surely no God would require this of the believer since people have different intellectual dispositions, and it would hardly make sense to favour the intellectually gifted or those who have the leisure to pursue such studies. The priest argues, 'I could never convince myself that God would require such learning of me upon pain of hell. So I closed all my books.'¹⁹ Book learning has nothing to teach about the nature of God and religion. One need only examine one's own heart in order to consider the divine.²⁰ This sort of examination was also available to those people in the state of nature, blissfully ignorant of the confusions of modern learning and sophisticated argumentation.

Just as the priest rejects the idea that the divine can be known through books or learned arguments, so he also rejects the notion of access to God through revelations: 'The grandest ideas of the Divine nature come to us from reason only. Behold the spectacle of nature; listen to the inner voice. Has not God spoken it all to our eyes, to our conscience, to our reason? What more can man tell us?'²¹ He believes that claims to revelations are what causes all forms of religious strife.²² Since access to the divine is not through books or revelation, the question arises of where it comes from. The priest argues that it is available through our immediate relation to nature and the world around us: 'All the theology I can get from myself by observation of the universe.'²³ God has endowed every human being with conscience, an inner voice or light. We need only follow this and we will

¹⁸ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, trans. by Barbara Foxley, NuVision Publications 2007, p. 283. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vols 1–4, Amsterdam: Jean Néaulme 1762, vol. 3, pp. 160–1: 'if there is but one true religion and if every man is bound to follow it under pain of damnation, he must spend his whole life studying, testing, comparing all these religions, in traveling through the countries in which they are established. No man is free from a man's first duty; no one has a right to depend on another's judgment. The artisan who earns his bread by his daily toil, the ploughboy who cannot read, the delicate and timid maiden, the invalid who can scarcely leave his bed, all without exception must study, consider, argue, travel over the whole world; there will be no more fixed and settled nations; the whole earth will swarm with pilgrims on their way, at great cost of time and trouble, to verify, compare and examine for themselves the various religions to be found.'

¹⁹ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 284. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, p. 163.

²⁰ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 262. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, p. 90: 'Still following the same method, I do not derive these rules from the principles of the higher philosophy. I find them in the depths of my heart, traced by nature in characters which nothing can efface.'

²¹ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 272. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, pp. 122–3.

²² Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 272. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, p. 123: 'Their revelations do but degrade God, by investing him with passions like our own. Far from throwing light upon the ideas of the Supreme Being, special doctrines seem to me to confuse these ideas; far from ennobling them, they degrade them; to the inconceivable mysteries which surround the Almighty, they add absurd contradictions, they make man proud, intolerant, and cruel; instead of bringing peace upon earth, they bring fires and sword.'

²³ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 274. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, p. 129.

necessarily come to knowledge of the divine. Rousseau makes the radical claim that everyone can reach the same conclusions about the divine if they merely consult their own conscience and allow it to guide them.²⁴

This leads the priest to the conclusion that all disputes among different religions or sects are in vain. There is truth in all religions, and one can be a pious individual as a follower of any religion. The priest proclaims:

I regard all individual religions as so many wholesome institutions which prescribe a uniform method by which each country may do honor to God in public worship; institutions which may each have its reason in the country, the government, the genius of the people, or in other local causes which make one preferable to another in a given time or place. I think them all good alike, when God is served in a fitting manner. True worship is of the heart. God rejects no homage, however offered, provided it is sincere.²⁵

All religions thus reduce to a single general religion to which all individuals have access. Although the different religions might vary in their outward ceremonies or doctrines, this is not the main thing. What counts is the sincere belief of the individual.

With this argument the priest in effect claims that the actual content of the individual religions is irrelevant. He enjoins his young friend not to learn about any specific religion but rather to have a pure heart: 'Moreover, whatever decision you come to, remember that the real duties of religion are independent of human institutions; that a righteous heart is the true temple of the Godhead; that in every land, in every sect, to love God above all things and to love our neighbor as ourself is the whole law.'²⁶ This sort of view eliminates the *content* of religion and focuses solely on the *form* of belief. For Hegel, this is deeply problematic since it leads to relativism, despite Rousseau's claim that all human beings would in principle reach the same conclusions if they were allowed to follow their own inner light.

For the priest, all that matters is having a sincere heart.²⁷ He claims: 'I need only consult myself with regard to what I wish to do; what I feel to be right is right, what I feel to be wrong is wrong.'²⁸ Right and wrong are thus adjudicated not by

²⁴ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 284. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, p. 163: 'Suppose I had been born in a desert island, suppose I had never seen any man but myself, suppose I had never heard what took place in olden days in a remote corner of the world, yet if I use my reason, if I cultivate it, if I employ rightly the innate faculties which God bestows upon me, I shall learn by myself to know and love him, to love his works, to will what he wills, and to fulfill all my duties upon earth, that I may do his pleasure. What more can all human learning teach me.'

²⁵ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 285. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, pp. 169–70.

²⁶ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, pp. 288–9. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, pp. 180–1.

²⁷ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 272. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, p. 124: 'Do not let us confuse the outward forms of religion with religion itself. The service God requires is of the heart, and when the heart is sincere that is ever the same.'

²⁸ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 262. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, p. 90.

any objective fact about the matter or the world but by the purity of the heart and good will. At the outset of his account of his creed, the priest states: 'If I am mistaken, I am honestly mistaken, and therefore my error will not be counted to me as a crime.'²⁹ Here one sees an echo of the Socratic doctrine that no one does evil willingly or consciously. Rousseau is undisturbed by the fact that one might have a sincere heart about something that is utterly wrong and that acting on such a conviction might lead to great suffering and injustice.

One can imagine that Rousseau believed that he was making a positive argument for religious toleration by showing that the key point was something that all religions had in common. His religious indifferentism seems clearly to claim that all religions are equally good and true. But what he did not count on was the outrage that resulted from his rejection of the individual Christian doctrines: original sin, Revelation, the Trinity, etc. These are precisely the things that help to distinguish one religion from another, and, by dismissing them, Rousseau's priest seems to dismiss Christianity. To Hegel's mind, this is clearly giving up too much to appease the critics of religion. This can hardly be taken as a defence of religion or Christianity specifically. One cannot hope to make a case for Christianity while at the same time giving up all of its dogmatic content. Simply to enjoin the religious believers to follow their hearts or conscience is not enough to constitute a meaningful defence of Christianity. Rousseau refers explicitly to Judaism and Islam as rivals to Christianity, but in the end he comes to the conclusion that they are equally true and good. For Hegel, there is nothing in this view of following one's own heart that can be used to determine any concrete truth. It thus ultimately leaves the matter in the hands of the individual believer, and this risks ending in fanaticism. Rousseau thinks that his principle will lead to a uniformity in religion, but without content it will, according to Hegel, lead to just the opposite: arbitrariness, relativism, and subjectivism.

3.2 Jacobi: Discursive Knowledge and Immediate Certainty

Another important figure in the wake of the Enlightenment was Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (1743–1819), who was a contemporary of Kant and whom Hegel regarded in some ways as a pendant to him. In all of his critical assessments, the text that Hegel refers to most often is Jacobi's *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* from 1785.³⁰ This book marks an

²⁹ Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 241. *Émile, ou de l'éducation*, vol. 3, p. 20.

³⁰ F. H. Jacobi, *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn*, Breslau: Gottl. Löwe 1785 (2nd ed. 1789). (In English as *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* in Jacobi, *The Main Philosophical Writings and the Novel Allwill*, trans. by George di Giovanni, Montreal et al.: McGill-Queen's University Press 2009, pp. 173–251.) Hegel uses the collected works edition: *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Werke*, vols 1–6, Leipzig: Gerhard Fleischer

important chapter in the development of German philosophy, namely, the so-called 'pantheism controversy'.³¹ Jacobi travelled from his home in Düsseldorf to Wolfenbüttel in July of 1780 in order to meet Lessing, whose recent works in connection with the controversy concerning the 'Wolfenbüttel fragments' had caught his attention. During their discussions Lessing told him of his great admiration for the philosophy of Spinoza. After the death of Lessing in 1781, Jacobi, in 1783, corresponded with Lessing's friend the philosopher, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), who was planning to write a tribute to Lessing's thought and character. Mendelssohn was wary of Jacobi's claims that Lessing had confided to him that he was a Spinozist. At the time this was considered quite scandalous since Spinoza's pantheist philosophy was generally regarded as a form of naturalism and this as more or less synonymous with atheism. Given the previous controversies in which Lessing's religious views were constantly called into question, this was highly incendiary information.

Somewhat taken aback by Jacobi's claim, Mendelssohn asked him for more precise information about what exactly Lessing had said. In his subsequent letter Jacobi explains the situation as follows:

Lessing came to my room where I was still busy with some letters that I had to write. I handed to him a number of things from my briefcase, to help him while away his time as he waited. When he gave them back he asked whether I had something else that he could read. "But yes!" I said... "here's a poem yet—you have given so much offense; you might as well receive some for once."³²

Jacobi here refers to the great offence that Lessing caused by publishing the 'fragments'. The poem that he gives Lessing to read is Goethe's 'Prometheus',³³

1812–25. (See *Hegel's Library*, entries 127–9, which refer oddly to three (and not all six) volumes of this edition.) This is in any case the edition that Hegel's refers to and quotes from in his account of Jacobi in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (*Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 410–23; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 535–51). Hegel also reviews the third volume of this edition in the *Heidelbergsche Jahrbücher der Litteratur*, vol. 10, Part 1 (January–June), nos 1–2, 1817, pp. 1–32. (For more on this review, see below.) See also Hegel, *EL*, § 62; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 165.

³¹ See Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte*, Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press 1987, pp. 61–92. Gérard Vallée, 'Introduction: The Spinoza Conversations between Lessing and Jacobi,' in *The Spinoza Conversations between Lessing and Jacobi*, trans. by Gérard Vallée et al., Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America 1988, pp. 1–62. Toshimasa Yasukata, *Lessing's Philosophy of Religion and the German Enlightenment*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002, pp. 117–39.

³² Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 185; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 11. (Translation slightly modified.)

³³ *Goethe's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe letzter Hand*, vols 1–55, Stuttgart and Tübingen: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung 1828–33, vol. 2 (1828), pp. 79–80. (For an English translation see Goethe, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Christopher Middleton, vol. 1, in *Goethe: The Collected Works*, vols 1–12, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994–95, pp. 27–31.) Note that when Jacobi published this poem in *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, it had not yet been published, and he did so apparently without seeking Goethe's permission.

which he expects will be offensive to him. In this poem, the Greek hero Prometheus is portrayed as railing against Zeus, the king of the gods. In defiance Prometheus portrays religious believers as ignorant, naïve, and childish people who seek aid and comfort in the gods. But although he also once used to believe in this way, Prometheus has realized that he is autonomous and that whatever he has achieved has been through his own efforts and not by any divine aid. In the end the gods are portrayed as a feeble and impoverished lot who, like humans, are subject to fate.

Lessing reads the poem and gives it back to Jacobi, saying, 'I take no offence.'³⁴ To Jacobi's great surprise, Lessing continues: 'The point of view from which the poem is treated is my own point of view . . . The orthodox concepts of the Divinity are no longer for me; I cannot stomach them. *Ἐν καὶ Πᾶν!* I know of nothing else. That is also the direction of the poem, and I must confess that I like it very much.'³⁵ Lessing uses the Greek slogan *Ἐν καὶ Πᾶν* or 'one and all' to convey the idea of a pantheistic God, that is, a God which is *one* but which encompasses *all* or the whole of nature. In short, according to Lessing's interpretation, the poem presents a Spinozist, pantheist position. Jacobi immediately makes this connection and concludes, half questioning and half stating, that this must mean that Lessing is in agreement with Spinoza. Again to Jacobi's astonishment, Lessing grants that this is the position that he wishes to advocate and that he has no objections to calling himself a Spinozist. Goethe's poem is thus the occasion for the entire subsequent discussion about the nature and implications of pantheism.

Jacobi published his correspondence in 1785 under the title *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*. In this work Jacobi reveals Lessing's self-proclaimed affiliation with Spinoza. With this the scandal began. Spinoza's pantheism denies a transcendent personal deity since it regards God to be synonymous with the world.³⁶ Far from being above nature or transcendent, God is rather simply the entire immanent sphere of nature. But if this is the case, then it looks very much like the notion of God has simply been reduced to the sum of the natural laws and physical entities. This is not the traditional notion of God as a loving, caring, self-conscious entity to which one can address one's prayers or confide one's hopes.

³⁴ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 187; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 12. (Translation modified.)

³⁵ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 187; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 12. (Translation modified.)

³⁶ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 199; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), pp. 41–2: 'Spinoza's God is the *pure* principle of the actuality of everything actual, of *being* in everything existent; is thoroughly without individuality, and absolutely infinite. The unity of this God rests on the identity of the indiscernible and hence does not exclude a sort of plurality. However, considered *merely* in its transcendental unity, the Divinity must do without any actuality whatever, for actuality can only be found expressed in determinate individuals.'

In *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza* Jacobi portrays how he and Lessing try to come to an agreement about what precisely Spinoza's doctrine is and what its consequences are. Jacobi claims that the point of departure for Spinoza is the proposition that nothing can come from nothing.³⁷ Everything that exists has a cause that preceded it. The idea that the universe or anything else could have been created out of nothing is simply an absurdity. It is impossible to explain how there can be a transition between the infinite and the finite, the transcendent and the immanent. Accordingly, for Spinoza, God or the first cause of the world cannot be something outside the vast universal system of cause and effect but rather must be immanent to it. Moreover, according to the interpretation given by Jacobi and agreed to by Lessing, since it would be impossible to explain how mind could causally affect matter, this means that God has no reason or will and, in short, is not a personal entity. While this is consistent with the position that Lessing had taken in the foregoing polemical discussions, it was nonetheless scandalous to state it so bluntly.

In the subsequent discussion Jacobi tries to criticize Spinoza and thus indirectly Lessing, while the latter tries to defend Spinoza's views. In this exchange Jacobi's own commitments begin to emerge. It quickly becomes clear that Spinoza is in a sense only an occasion to discuss a much wider issue, that is the secular, scientific, rationalist conception of the world that results from the Enlightenment's criticism of religion. Spinoza is made into the spokesman for this view that Jacobi finds problematic. Jacobi objects that any philosophy that regards the universe as an immanent, closed system of cause-and-effect relations rules out any meaningful conception of the divine and results in determinism. It does not make sense to talk about God as being compelled by the cause-and-effect relations of the world. God is free and cannot be determined in this way. Similarly, if everything is subject to mechanical cause-and-effect relations, then there is no real free will and everything that we do is ultimately determined by prior causes. When we think that we act on our own decisions and will, this is simply an illusion.³⁸

For Jacobi this kind of thinking fails to do justice to our intuitions of free will and reduces all human action to fatalism. We all believe that we are acting freely, but the problem (as Kant showed) is how to demonstrate it in the empirical world, where we seem to be just one small part of a vast network of mechanistic causal relations. Here Jacobi is generally critical of the entire rationalist enterprise of attempting to explain everything. This, he believes, invariably leads to absurdities. Although some philosophical systems have compelling explanations for some things, they all end up in difficulty when they try to expand their basic principle

³⁷ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, pp. 187–8; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 14.

³⁸ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 189; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 19: 'We only believe that we have acted out of anger, love, and magnanimity, or out of rational decision. Mere illusion! What fundamentally moves us in all these cases is *something that knows nothing of all that*, and which is *to this extent* absolutely devoid of sensations and thoughts.'

and explain everything. When they do this, they always stumble upon cases that defy them and show the limitation of rational explanation as such. Jacobi explains:

I love Spinoza, because he, more than any other philosopher, has led me to the perfect conviction that certain things admit of no explanation: one must not therefore keep one's eyes shut to them, but must take them as one finds them. I have no concept more intimate than that of the final cause; no conviction more vital than that *I do what I think*, and not, *that I should think what I do*. Truly, therefore, I must assume a source of thought and action that remains completely inexplicable to me.³⁹

Jacobi refers to the Aristotelian notion of a final cause, that is, an end or goal of a thing which is posited by a person or intelligent agent. It is natural for us to believe that when we act, we do so with a goal or purpose in mind. Our intuition of free will tells us that we think, plan, and then act in accordance with this, or as Jacobi says, 'I do what I think.' On the alternative deterministic model, I can still be a self-conscious intelligent agent, but I am not the author of my actions since they are simply the necessary result of previous causes. Thus my intelligence is used to merely observe what I do, or, as Jacobi put it, 'I... think what I do.'

But we find ourselves unable to explain this intuition of free will. For Jacobi, philosophers have been all too obsessed with explaining everything. The goal is, first, the Kantian one of distinguishing clearly what can be known by the faculty of human cognition and what cannot. The goal should be not to 'want to explain what is incomprehensible, but only [to want] to know the boundary where it begins and just recognize that it is there.'⁴⁰ Once this demarcation is established, then one should desist from trying to explain what lies beyond what can be known. Such things should simply be accepted and not regarded as a grave threat or a problem to be solved. The ultimate goal of the philosopher is thus not explanation as such; this is limited and secondary. Jacobi writes: 'In my judgment the great service of the scientists is to unveil existence, and to reveal it... Explanation is a means for him, a pathway to his destination, a proximate—never a final—goal. His final goal is what cannot be explained; the unanalyzable, the immediate, the simple.'⁴¹ The natural impulse of the scientifically minded person is constantly to seek an explanation for everything that has yet to be fully understood or explained. The difficult thing for the rationalist is thus to desist from the attempt to explain something and to let it remain a mystery.

Ultimately rationalist and scientific explanations are, for Jacobi, only a second-order kind of knowing. There is a higher kind of knowing that can be employed

³⁹ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 193; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 29.

⁴⁰ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 194; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), pp. 30–1.

⁴¹ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 194; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), pp. 31–2.

when discussing things like God and free will. Our obsession with philosophical explanations simply clouds this higher knowing.⁴² According to Jacobi, there is an *immediate certainty* that we call 'faith'. This is the highest form of knowing upon which all forms of discursive, rational explanation are founded. There is an immediate certainty that we are born with and which is prior to all demonstration through proofs.⁴³ Following in the footsteps of Rousseau, he argues that we have an immediate knowledge of ourselves and our bodies. Through our bodies we have an awareness of things outside us, that is, real things in the world.⁴⁴ This represents a 'revelation of nature', which we cannot help but believe.⁴⁵ Free will and belief in the external world are facts of experience that require no demonstration or explanation. Conviction of these things comes from faith and not reason. In comparison to this, the conviction that is based on proofs and scientific explanations appears quite impoverished. It would be absurd to imagine anyone truly doubting these things. No philosopher or scientist could ever seriously entertain the notion that he did not exist or that there were no external objects in the world, even though these things cannot be demonstrated with the tools of scientific reason. If one were to doubt these fundamental things stringently (in the way that would seem to be the natural consequence of rationalism), then it would be impossible to live and function in the world. For Jacobi, it makes more sense to hang on to these immediate certainties and simply accept them as nondemonstrable; but this is exactly what the rationalists have a hard time doing.

This then leads Jacobi to the question of Christian faith. He readily admits that the immediate certainty or faith in the existence of oneself and the external world is different from Christian faith; while the former concerns the universal or eternal truths, the latter concerns the individual, finite human being.⁴⁶ He explains: 'The religion of the Christians instructs man how to take on qualities through which he can make progress in his existence and propel himself to a higher life—and with this life to a higher consciousness, in this consciousness to a higher cognition.'⁴⁷ This awareness of God comes through living a Christian life and is something 'higher than all reason'.⁴⁸ Just as we have immediate certainty about the world

⁴² Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, pp. 194–5; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 32.

⁴³ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 230; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 162: 'we are all born in the faith, and we must remain in the faith, just as we are all born in society, and must remain in society. *Totum parte prius esse necesse est*. How can we strive for certainty unless we are already acquainted with certainty in advance, and how can we be acquainted with it except through something that we already discern with certainty? This leads to the concept of an immediate certainty, which not only needs proof, but excludes all proofs absolutely, and is simply and solely the *representation itself agreeing with the thing being represented*. Conviction by proofs is certainty at second hand.' See Hegel's polemical response to this: *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 159–65; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 70–5.

⁴⁴ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 231; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 163.

⁴⁵ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 231; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 164.

⁴⁶ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 231; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 164.

⁴⁷ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 231; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 164.

⁴⁸ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 231; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 165.

around us simply by being born into and living in it, so also we have immediate access to God not by concepts, proofs or demonstrations, but by everyday life and action in the world. One of Jacobi's conclusions is thus, 'Faith is the element of all human cognition and activity.'⁴⁹

Jacobi is keen to focus on the immediate life and action of the individual. This is what he claims is the sphere of immediate knowing that forms the background for everything else. In contrast to this, everything that issues from rationalist thinking is secondary and comes after the fact. This is always a poor attempt to understand the original phenomena and can never match the standard of the original:

Reason that has fallen into poverty and has become speculative, or in other words, *degenerate* reason, can neither commend nor tolerate this practical path. It has neither hand nor foot for digging, yet it is too proud to beg. Hence it must drag itself here and there, looking for a truth that left when the contemplative understanding left, for religion and its goods—just as morality must do, looking for virtuous inclinations that have disappeared; and laws must also, looking for the fallen public spirit and the better customs.⁵⁰

Philosophical theories of morality always come after the fact, that is, after actual virtuous actions in the world. Likewise, laws are made later based on the reigning customs of a people. So also with regard to religion, philosophical theories always come later and cannot hope adequately to capture the religious truth that lies in immediate existence and action in the world. What is fundamental and most important is the original sphere of experience and action; all explanation and description comes later and is only secondary. The Enlightenment has become so blindly fixated on giving rational explanations that this has come to be the primary thing and not the secondary one. But this is a misunderstanding since the sphere of immediate certainty is clearly more fundamental than that of discursive rationality.

Jacobi is anxious to make clear that, unlike Spinoza, he believes in a personal God.⁵¹ He further claims that the source of all of our knowledge and insight derives from God. The fact that human beings are made in the image of God allows us to know the truth.⁵² This view affords him an opportunity to explain by analogy more about what he means by immediate certainty in contrast to discursive rationality. He uses the analogy of the relation of parents to their children to illustrate the relation between God and human beings:

⁴⁹ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 234; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 172.

⁵⁰ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 232; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 166.

⁵¹ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 189; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 17: 'I believe in an intelligent personal cause of the world.'

⁵² Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 242; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), p. 193.

Look at your children, or the children of your friend. They obey authority, without comprehending the father's mind. If they are obstinate and do not obey, they will never interiorize it; they will never truly know the father himself. If they are docile, the father's mind, his inner life, will gradually be transferred to them; their understanding will awaken, and they will know the father. No pedagogical art, no instruction, would have been capable of bringing them to that point, *if their living knowledge had not grown first out of their very life*. In all things man's understanding comes only at secondhand.⁵³

We can know the mind of God by submitting our will to Him and by living a correct Christian life. Any formal instruction is always secondary to this immediate lived experience.

Unlike most of the previous thinkers mentioned above, who celebrate the power of the faculty of reason, Jacobi disparages it as something limited and derivative. He believes that the Enlightenment has done much damage in its promise to overcome prejudice and superstition by the use of reason. It has delivered a secular world view, in which everything is explained in terms of nature and cause and effect relations. It denies any transcendent sphere which scientific reason cannot reach. If there is to be any room for God left in this picture, then it is a God in the immanent sphere of nature—Spinoza's pantheistic God as synonymous with nature. For Jacobi, this world-view ends in absurdity by ignoring what are obvious immediate truths that are available to everyone. Since it insists on rational justification and demonstration of everything, the scientific view cannot accept the many points of immediate conviction, even though they are completely intuitive for everyone. Thus Jacobi argues for a common-sense view that opens up the possibility of faith in a personal God in a way that takes into account the criticisms issued by Enlightenment reason.

3.3 Hegel's Criticism of Jacobi

Hegel read Jacobi's *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn* and other works when he was a student in Tübingen,⁵⁴ where the controversy exercised him and his fellow students. He is highly critical of Jacobi's philosophy in a long section in his early article 'Faith and Knowledge',⁵⁵ where this work is treated explicitly. Jacobi has also been identified as the object of Hegel's

⁵³ Jacobi, *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, p. 245; *Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza* (1785), pp. 201–2.

⁵⁴ Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*, p. 40. See also H. S. Harris, *Hegel's Development*, vol. 1, *Toward the Sunlight 1770–1801*, p. 98. See Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000, pp. 30–3.

⁵⁵ Hegel, 'Glauben und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjektivität, in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen, als Kantische, Jacobische und Fichtesche Philosophie,' *Kritisches*

criticism in the section 'Conscience, the Beautiful Soul, Evil and its Forgiveness,' from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁵⁶ This criticism turns to a more positive analysis in a review article from 1817 of the third volume of Jacobi's collected works.⁵⁷ Hegel adds a section on Jacobi under the heading, 'The Third Position of Thought with Respect to Objectivity: Immediate Knowing', in the second edition of the *Encyclopedia* from 1827.⁵⁸ Jacobi is also discussed in Hegel's review from 1828 of the collected writings of Hamann in the seven-volume edition by Karl Johann Friedrich Roth (1780–1852).⁵⁹ Hegel's review from 1829 of Karl Friedrich Göschel's (1781–1861) *Aphorismen über Nichtwissen und absolutes Wissen* likewise contains a discussion of Jacobi.⁶⁰ Hegel also dedicates a shorter analysis to Jacobi in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.⁶¹ Finally, Hegel discusses Jacobi's position in the section 'Immediate Knowing' in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* from 1824 and 1827.⁶² It should be noted that Hegel knew Jacobi personally; the two met in 1812 in Nuremberg and again in 1815

Journal der Philosophie, vol. 2, no. 1, 1802, pp. 1–188. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, vols 16–17 (1834–35) in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 16, pp. 3–157. In *Jub.*, vol. 1, pp. 277–433. (In English as *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. by Walter Cerf and H. S. Harris, Albany: State University of New York Press 1977.) See Pierre Brüggen, 'La Critique de Jacobi par Hegel dans "Foi et Savoir,"' *Archives de Philosophie*, vol. 30, 1967, pp. 187–98. For the connection between Hegel and Jacobi in general, see also Gerhard Höhn, 'F. H. Jacobi et G. W. F. Hegel ou la naissance du nihilisme et la renaissance du "Logos,"' *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 75, no. 2, 1970, pp. 129–50. Gilbert Kirscher, 'Hegel et la philosophie de F. H. Jacobi,' in *Hegel-Tage Urbino 1965. Vorträge*, ed. by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Bonn: Bouvier 1969 (*Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 4), pp. 181–91.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *PhS*, pp. 383–409; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 484–516. See Gustav Falke, 'Hegel und Jacobi. Ein methodisches Beispiel zur Interpretation der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*,' *Hegel-Studien*, vol. 22, 1987, pp. 129–42.

⁵⁷ Hegel, 'Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Werke. Dritter Band. Leipzig, bey Gerhard Fleischer d. Jüng., 1816. XXXVI und 568 S.,' *Heidelbergerische Jahrbücher der Litteratur*, vol. 10, Part 1 (January–June), nos 1–2, 1817, pp. 1–32. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, vols 16–17 (1834–35) in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 17, pp. 3–37. In *Jub.*, vol. 6, pp. 313–47. (In English as 'Review: Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's Works, Volume III,' in Hegel, *Heidelberg Writings*, trans. and ed. by Brady Bowman and Allen Speight, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. 3–31.) See Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, pp. 384–8.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *EL*, §§ 61–78; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 164–84.

⁵⁹ Hegel, 'Hamanns Schriften. Herausgegeben von Friedrich Roth. VII Th. Berlin, bei Reimer 1821–1825,' *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, 1828, Erster Artikel (October), vol. II, nos 77–8, pp. 620–4, nos 79–80, pp. 625–40; Zweiter Artikel (December), vol. II, nos 107–8, pp. 859–64, nos 109–10, pp. 865–80, nos 111–12, pp. 881–96, nos 113–14, pp. 897–900. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, vols 16–17 (1834–35) in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 17, pp. 38–110. In *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 203–75. (In English in *Hegel on Hamann*, trans. by Lise Marie Anderson, Evanston: Northwestern University Press 2008, pp. 1–53.)

⁶⁰ Hegel, 'Aphorismen über Nichtwissen und absolutes Wissen im Verhältnisse zur christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis. — Ein Beitrag zum Verständnisse der Philosophie unserer Zeit. Von Carl Friederich G. . . . I. — Berlin, bei E. Franklin. 1829,' *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, 1829, nos 99–102, pp. 789–816; nos 105–6, pp. 833–5. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, vols 16–17 (1834–35) in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 17, pp. 111–48. In *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 276–13. (In English as 'Review of K. F. Göschel's *Aphorisms*,' in *MW*, pp. 401–29.)

⁶¹ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 410–23; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 535–51.

⁶² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 261–8; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 168–268. *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 385–9; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 281–5. See also *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 234–7; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 143–7. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 575; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 471.

when Hegel visited Munich.⁶³ It is presumed that this personal contact did much to cause Hegel to re-evaluate his initial critical opinion of Jacobi's philosophy.

Hegel objects primarily to Jacobi's hard and fast distinction between immediate and mediated knowledge. First, Hegel points out that it is problematic to think that our knowledge of God is immediate. When one thinks of the conception of the divine that one sees in children or in 'the natural man', these views are quite distant from our conception of God that Jacobi clearly wants to defend. Our understanding of God is as an object of thought, a universal, but the natural man is concerned virtually exclusively with the particulars of perception since he is not able to surpass the immediate objects of sense and grasp something higher: 'the immediate man in his natural condition, in his desires, does not know this universal. Children, the eskimos, etc., know nothing of God; or what the natural man knows of him is not a real knowledge of Him. Thus the intuitive knowledge of the Egyptians told them that God was an ox or a cat, and the Indians still possess similar sorts of knowledge.'⁶⁴ These examples provide a much closer picture of what immediate knowledge of the divine would amount to than what Jacobi sketches. Rather, Jacobi wants a conception of the divine that is in tune with his readers' natural intuitions, but this is a completely different concept that has developed over time through education and is not immediately given.

Hegel argues that this distinction between immediate and mediated knowledge breaks down when one begins to examine it in more detail.⁶⁵ What one takes to be immediate knowledge is in fact always conditioned by other things which are simply not explicit at the moment. He claims, 'All life is process within itself, is mediated, and this is all the more true of spiritual life.'⁶⁶ In this sense it is absurd to try to isolate individual elements of thought or experience and assert that they are immediate and have absolutely no connection to anything else. Hegel gives the following examples to demonstrate how what one might take to be immediate knowledge always implicitly relies on other things and is thus mediated:

I know, for example, of America immediately, and yet this knowledge is very much mediated. If I stand in America and see its soil, I must first of all have journeyed to it, Columbus must first have discovered it, ships must have been built, etc.; all these discoveries and inventions pertain to it. That which we know immediately is consequently a result of infinitely many mediations. Likewise when I see a right-angled triangle I know that the squares of the two sides are equal to the square of the hypotenuse; I know this immediately, and yet I have

⁶³ Brady Bowman and Allen Speight, 'Introduction,' in Hegel, *Heidelberg Writings*, trans. and ed. by Brady Bowman and Allen Speight, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009, pp. xi–xii.

⁶⁴ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 420; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 549.

⁶⁵ See *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 172–3; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 81–2.

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 421; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 549–50.

merely learned it and am convinced of it through the mediation of proof. Immediate knowledge is thus everywhere mediated.⁶⁷

Likewise with the concept of God it is absurd to think that we have immediate knowledge of God when the actual content that is referred to is clearly something that we have learned through many years from our culture, upbringing, or formal instruction. There is thus nothing that is absolutely immediate. Immediacy and mediation are dialectically related concepts, which mutually flow into one another.

Hegel further believes that Jacobi's view leads to a dangerous form of subjectivism. If each individual has immediate access to the divine, then this leaves it to the individual to decide in what this consists. Since it is immediate, there is no need for this knowledge to be discussed or negotiated with other people. Each individual operates as a monad with his or her own view: 'If immediate knowledge is to be allowed, everyone will be responsible merely to himself: this man knows this, another that, and consequently everything is justified and approved, however contrary to right and religion.'⁶⁸ This tendency towards subjectivism, Hegel claims, is a feature that Jacobi's thought shares with others in the period, such as Schleiermacher and the Romantics. While it is true that it is the principle of the modern world to recognize the value of the individual and to grant that each person has the right to give his or her consent to the truth, it does not follow from this that the truth itself is subjective and determined by that person's assent.

Although he claims to criticize Enlightenment reason, Jacobi in fact ends up with the same result as the Enlightenment with respect to the issue of God. Jacobi's argument states that we have immediate knowledge of the existence of God, but we do not know anything more about Him, that is, His nature, properties, etc. since that would be to bring the divine into the finite sphere of causal knowing. But this means that God is a transcendent abstraction. Hegel explains: 'There thus remains only the indeterminate conception of God, an "Above me," an indeterminate Beyond. This gives accordingly the same result as does the Enlightenment, namely, that the highest reality is ultimate.'⁶⁹ Hegel sees Jacobi as yet another thinker who has emptied the conception of the divine and eliminated the key concepts of dogmatics.

The claim about Lessing's pantheism was important in the historical context since it was a forerunner of a general attraction to Spinoza's pantheism among the German Romantics. They found the pantheist view sympathetic since it implied that God was present in nature and in every human being. This was an important

⁶⁷ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 422; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 549.

⁶⁸ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 421; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 547.

⁶⁹ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 422; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 548.

dimension in the Spinoza renaissance in German philosophy at the time.⁷⁰ Moreover, when the German-speaking world began to discover the philosophy and religion of ancient India around the turn of the nineteenth century, many scholars believed that Spinoza's pantheism bore a family resemblance to the doctrine of the Hindus. Thus, although the initial issue about Lessing's affiliation with Spinoza might seem at first glance to be a somewhat idiosyncratic and marginal one, in fact, in the course of time it proved to have an important precursor in many different aspects of German intellectual life in the decades to come.

3.4 Schleiermacher: Intuition and Immediate Feeling

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was another important figure during Hegel's time. He too was acutely aware of the criticism that the Enlightenment had issued against religion and attempted to address himself to it in his popular work, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* from 1799.⁷¹ Based on his discussions in Berlin with the leading figures of the German Romantic movement, this work attempts to defend religion against its Enlightenment critics. Inspired by his friends Friedrich von Schlegel (1772–1829) and August Wilhelm von Schlegel (1767–1845), Schleiermacher saw in the Romantics' emphasis on emotion and feeling a possible line of defence for religion that he spent a lifetime developing.

For Schleiermacher, it was a mistake to try to argue with the Enlightenment thinkers about the rationality of religious belief. This kind of argumentation always seemed doomed to failure since religion could never hope to match up to the same demanding requirements of natural scientific demonstration. So instead of trying to defend the rationality of religious belief in this way, Schleiermacher shifted the discussion entirely: he argues religion is not ultimately about reason or the rational faculty but rather about intuition (*Anschaung*) and feeling. With a single move, Schleiermacher had taken religion away from the usual discussions with the sciences. Religious feeling was not something that

⁷⁰ See *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. by Eckart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012. F. C. Copleston, 'Pantheism in Spinoza and the German Idealists,' *Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 78, 1946, pp. 42–56.

⁷¹ Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*, Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger 1799. English translation: *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. by Richard Crouter, New York: Cambridge University Press 1988. For secondary literature on Schleiermacher, see Karl Barth, 'Schleiermacher' in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 411–59. Richard Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005. Jack Forstman, *A Romantic Triangle: Schleiermacher and Early German Romanticism*, Missoula, MT: Scholars Press 1977. B. A. Gerrish, *A Prince of the Church: Schleiermacher and the Beginnings of Modern Theology*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984. Martin Redeker, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*, trans. by John Wallhauser, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1973.

science can attack. It was not some external object in the world that could be examined, compared, quantified, and accepted or rejected based on scientific criteria. Instead, it dwelled in the inward sphere of the human mind, safely immune from the criticisms.

In the 'Second Speech' Schleiermacher argues that religion is often confused with two different fields, metaphysics and morality. While he grants that these 'both have the same object as religion, namely, the universe and the relationship of humanity to it',⁷² it would be a mistake to confuse these spheres. He thus quickly attempts to delineate the proper task and province of each of these areas. Metaphysics 'classifies the universe and divides it into this being and that, seeks out the reasons for what exists, and deduces the necessity of what is real while spinning the reality of the world and its laws out of itself.'⁷³ Since we tend to think that questions about God, immortality and human freedom are also general questions about the universe, it would seem that metaphysics overlaps in part with religion. But Schleiermacher is adamant that religion is something fundamentally different from metaphysics and from the concepts of God, immortality and freedom, which are all in some way secondary to what is truly religious. Morality, by contrast, 'develops a system of duties out of human nature and our relation to the universe; it commands and forbids actions with unlimited authority.'⁷⁴ We often take morality to be associated with religion to the extent that the commands of morality issue from God; as Kant noted, an important aspect of morality concerns the idea that there is a divine justice that rules the moral world. But once again, for Schleiermacher, this is all something secondary to religion. He concludes:

In order to take possession of its own domain, religion renounces herewith all claims to whatever belongs to those others and gives back everything that has been forced upon it. It does not wish to determine and explain the universe according to its nature as does metaphysics; it does not desire to continue the universe's development and perfect it by the power of freedom and the divine free choice of a human being as does morals. Religion's essence is neither thinking nor acting, but intuition and feeling.⁷⁵

Here Schleiermacher introduces his famous claim that 'intuition and feeling' are the fundamental faculties of religion in an attempt to carve out a space for it that is distinct from metaphysics and ethics.

⁷² Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 19; *Über die Religion*, p. 41.

⁷³ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 20; *Über die Religion*, p. 42.

⁷⁴ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 20; *Über die Religion*, p. 43.

⁷⁵ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 22; *Über die Religion*, p. 50.

He echoes Kant's division between theoretical or speculative reason (metaphysics) and practical reason (ethics). As has been seen, Kant argues in detail that questions about God and immortality cannot be treated by theoretical reason since they transcend the objects of possible experience. Kant's conclusion is that they can, however, be treated in the other sphere of reason, namely, practical reason. Schleiermacher seems initially to accept Kant's division, but instead of following Kant's line of reasoning from the theoretical to the practical, he denies that religion can be treated in either of these and attempts to identify a third separate domain:

Thus religion maintains its own sphere and its own character only by completely removing itself from the sphere and character of speculation as well as from that of praxis. Only when it places itself next to both of them is the common ground perfectly filled out and human nature completed from this dimension. Religion shows itself to you as the necessary and indispensable third next to those two, as their natural counterpart, not slighter in worth and splendor than you wish of them.⁷⁶

So contrary to Kant, Schleiermacher insists that a third sphere exists which offers a solution to the problem of the objects of religion. Immediate intuition and feeling are what provides us with access to the religious.

But by 'feeling' here Schleiermacher does not mean just any whim, humour, or subjective notion that we happen to have. He speaks specifically about the way in which our senses are affected by individual things in the universe:

The universe exists in uninterrupted activity and reveals itself to us every moment. Every form that it brings forth, every being to which it gives separate existence according to the fullness of life, every occurrence that spills forth from its rich, ever-fruitful womb, is an action of the same upon us. Thus to accept everything individual as a part of the whole and everything limited as a representation of the infinite is religion.⁷⁷

This is what he refers to as the 'intuition of the universe'.⁷⁸ Schleiermacher thus comes to this very idiosyncratic definition of religion. While some might grant that feeling plays a role in religion, Schleiermacher's claim is much more radical. He says that this perception of the universe and its objects is what *constitutes* religion. This claim strikes us as counterintuitive since we are accustomed to associating religion with God, immortality, and other key dogmas. But, for

⁷⁶ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 23; *Über die Religion*, p. 52.

⁷⁷ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 25; *Über die Religion*, p. 56.

⁷⁸ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 24; *Über die Religion*, p. 55.

Schleiermacher, these things are secondary. Moreover, his claim is striking since this immediate experience of the universe could in principle be conceived as entirely secular given that it is primarily about perceiving the universe and its objects, or, put differently, it is about the effects that the universe and its objects make on our senses.

But Schleiermacher claims that this fundamental or primordial relation to the universe is the basis for what we understand as religion. He insists on holding fast to the primary individual aspect of the experience and not allowing it to develop into thoughts and ideas. Religion is about this primary experience, and when people go beyond it and begin to reflect and develop concepts and theories, they have left the sphere of religion.⁷⁹ The characteristic of sense perception is particularity; each perception is a unique particular thing. By contrast, the characteristic of thought and ideas is universality; ideas such as the True and the Good are general concepts and not specific things. Thus Schleiermacher's claim is that religion is about holding firmly to the original experience of the world in all its manifoldness and particularly. We should concentrate on this and resist the impulse to explain, theorize, and categorize, for as soon as we do this, we depart from the sphere of religion.

An important advantage of this view, for Schleiermacher, is that it allows us to be tolerant with respect to religion. He explains:

Each person must be conscious that his religion is only a part of the whole, that regarding the same objects that affect him religiously there are views just as pious and, nevertheless, completely different from his own, and that from other elements of religion intuitions and feelings flow, the sense for which he may be completely lacking.⁸⁰

This awareness of our own feelings makes us sensitive to the religious feeling of others and allows us to respect it, even though it may be very different from ours. In this way Schleiermacher can agree with the Enlightenment critics, such as Voltaire, that all of the abuses and atrocities that happen in the name of religion should be stopped and avoided, but at the same time deflect the criticism by saying that such things ultimately have nothing to do with religion itself since religion is about an immediate feeling and not about thought (as in dogmatic disputes) or

⁷⁹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 26; *Über die Religion*, p. 58: 'Intuition is and always remains something individual, set apart, the immediate perception, nothing more. To bind it and to incorporate it into a whole is once more the business not of sense but of abstract thought. The same is true of religion; it stops with the immediate experiences of the existence and action of the universe, with the individual intuitions and feelings; each of these is a self-contained work without connections with others or dependence upon them; it knows nothing about derivation and connection, for among all things religion can encounter, that is what its nature most opposes. Not only an individual fact or deed that one could call original and first, but everything in religion is immediate and true for itself.'

⁸⁰ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 27; *Über die Religion*, pp. 62–3.

action (as in wars, persecutions, etc.): 'What is it in religion over which men have argued, taken sides, and ignited wars? Sometimes over morals and always over metaphysics, and neither of these belongs to it.'⁸¹ The criticism of the Enlightenment is off-target when it tries to hold religion responsible for these abuses. The Enlightenment thus sets up a mistaken conception of religion and proceeds to criticize and condemn it, but its original definition of religion is based on a fundamental misconception.

In the intervening years between *On Religion* and Schleiermacher's *magnum opus*, the two-volume work, *The Christian Faith* from 1821 to 1822,⁸² a new political dimension of his theory of faith emerged. Concerned about the possibility of religious conflict in Prussia, King Frederick Wilhelm III (1770–1840) instituted a series of decrees that united the Lutheran and Calvinist Churches. This culminated in the creation of the Church of the Prussian Union in 1817. Schleiermacher was a strong advocate of the King's reform plan, and a part of this can be seen in his theology. In *The Christian Faith* he is keen to avoid anything that might involve a doctrinal dispute between the two confessions. Instead, he tries to smooth over the differences and present a theory that would be palatable to both parties. The doctrine of faith as the feeling of absolute dependency perfectly fits the bill since both Lutherans and Calvinists can easily subscribe to it.⁸³ The real advantage with this theory was that it locates the essence of religion at a place that is more fundamental and prior to cognitive thought and thus doctrine. If it is a matter of a basic feeling that precedes all reflection and consideration of religion and that is common to all human beings, then it can include in principle all the confessions of the Reformation and indeed of other religions as well.

In *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher continues where he left off in *On Religion* by claiming that religion or faith, which is now replaced by the word 'piety', is not a matter of knowing or of doing. It is instead a third thing, namely, a 'feeling'.⁸⁴ Schleiermacher explains that by this he means a fundamental form of immediate self-consciousness. This then gets developed more specifically to 'the feeling of absolute dependency'.⁸⁵ Schleiermacher argues that there are always two separate elements or dimensions of human self-consciousness. We are always

⁸¹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 28; *Über die Religion*, p. 63.

⁸² Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange*, vols 1–2, Berlin: G. Reimer 1821–22. English translation: *The Christian Faith*, trans. by H. R. Macintosh and J. S. Stewart, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark 1999. (Note that the English translation is based on the expanded and more influential second edition, *Der christliche Glaube nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhange*, vols 1–2, Berlin: G. Reimer 1830–31. It is this second edition that is referred to in the following references.)

⁸³ This is clearly evident in the thesis to § 3 at the beginning of the book, which states: 'The piety which forms the basis of all ecclesiastical communions is...neither a knowing nor a doing, but a modification of feeling, or of immediate self-consciousness.' (My italics.) Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 3, p. 5; *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 3, p. 7.

⁸⁴ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 3, pp. 5–12; *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 3, pp. 7–16.

⁸⁵ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, pp. 12–18; *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, pp. 16–24.

aware of ourselves as a unity, but, by contrast, we are also aware of ourselves as a plurality of changing determinations, that is, perceptions, ideas, actions, etc. The latter is clearly the active side of self-consciousness, that is, the side that it itself produces and is responsible for. From this we have a feeling of freedom. The former, however, represents the passive or receptive side; it 'presupposes for every self-consciousness another factor beside the ego, a factor which is the source of the particular determination, and without which the self-consciousness would not be precisely what it is.'⁸⁶ Through this we realize that we can only partially determine ourselves. We become aware that we are dependent on something greater beyond ourselves.

When we weigh these two feelings, that of freedom and that of dependency, we realize that the active part of the self is always dependent on a number of things over which it has no control. Therefore, this feeling of freedom is limited, and there is 'no such thing as a feeling of absolute freedom'.⁸⁷ By contrast, the feeling of dependence is absolute. We could not act in the world if our being or consciousness were not given ahead of time. But over this we have no control. He writes:

But the self-consciousness which accompanies all our activity, and therefore... accompanies our whole existence, and negates absolute freedom, is itself precisely a consciousness of absolute dependence; for it is the consciousness that the whole of our spontaneous activity comes from a source outside of us in just the same sense in which anything towards which we should have a feeling of absolute freedom must have proceeded entirely from ourselves.⁸⁸

According to Schleiermacher, every human being has the profound and fundamental sense of being dependent on some higher power. We become ill, suffer, and die; many things happen to us in the course of our lives that are not in our control. This gives rise to a deep sense of the contingency of our existence. We realize that at any moment we could be struck down and perish. This produces in us a sense of absolute dependency.

For Schleiermacher, it is then just a short step to call the origin of this feeling of absolute dependency 'God'. He claims, 'the *Whence* of our receptive and active existence, as implied in this self-consciousness, is to be designated by the word "God," and that... is for us the really original signification of that word.'⁸⁹ For this reason, he claims, the feeling of absolute dependency is the same as being aware of or related to God. This is, according to his view, an absolutely fundamental and

⁸⁶ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 13; *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, p. 17.

⁸⁷ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 15; *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, pp. 20–1.

⁸⁸ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 16; *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, pp. 21–2.

⁸⁹ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 16; *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, p. 22.

universal human experience. But this is not to imply that we have some prior cognitive knowledge of the divine; rather, this is a precognitive feeling that indicates an inescapable relation to the divine. Humans have therefore an immediate self-consciousness of God. Schleiermacher readily admits that this is to make God and a feeling synonymous: 'in the first instance God signifies for us simply that which is the co-determinant in this feeling and to which we trace our being in such a state [sc. of absolute dependency]; and any further content of the idea must be developed out of this fundamental import assigned it.'⁹⁰ Here Schleiermacher seems to acknowledge a key point that will be relevant for Hegel's polemic with him, namely, that this original feeling has, at least in the first instance, no determinate content, and therefore the conception of God that it implies likewise has no content.

In *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher then tries to derive the key Christian dogmas from this basic premise of the feeling of absolute dependency. The appeal to feeling is clearly conceived as an attempt to sidestep the criticisms of the Enlightenment. If faith is a primordial feeling deeply rooted in human consciousness, then it is difficult to see how it could be subject to the kind of scientific refutation that the followers of the Enlightenment revel in. The question is whether or not it preserves the key elements of Christian doctrine that are desired. Hegel believes that, despite Schleiermacher's best efforts, it does not.

3.5 Hegel's Criticism of Schleiermacher

Hegel's relation to Schleiermacher was complicated by the fact that they knew each other personally in Berlin.⁹¹ Hegel dedicates a fair amount of space to Schleiermacher's view in his lectures.⁹² He is critical of this view on many different scores. First, it appeals to what is transitory and not what is lasting. Clearly we have many different kinds of feelings that come and go, but surely our belief in the divine cannot be based on something so ephemeral, insignificant, and

⁹⁰ Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, § 4, p. 17; *Der christliche Glaube*, vol. 1, § 4, p. 23.

⁹¹ For accounts of Hegel's view of Schleiermacher's theology, see Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*, pp. 70–97. Hermann Glockner, 'Hegel und Schleiermacher im Kampf um Religionsphilosophie und Glaubenslehre,' in his *Beiträge zum Verständnis und zur Kritik Hegels sowie zur Umgestaltung seiner Geisteswelt*, Bonn: Bouvier 1965 (*Hegel-Studien*, Beiheft 2), pp. 246–71. Jeffrey Hoover, 'The Origin of the Conflict between Hegel and Schleiermacher at Berlin,' *The Owl of Minerva*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1988, pp. 69–79. Philip M. Merklinger, *Philosophy, Theology, and Hegel's Berlin Philosophy of Religion, 1821–1827*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1993, pp. 43–90. See also David D. Possen, 'Martensen's Theonomic Enterprise: An Advance beyond Hegel?' in *Hans Lassen Martensen: Theologian, Philosopher and Social Critic*, ed. by Jon Stewart, Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press 2012 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 6), pp. 239–70. Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005, pp. 108–11.

⁹² See *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 390–6; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 285–91.

trivial. To Hegel's mind, the goal should rather be to try to find a firm footing for faith in the highest human faculty and not in the lowest. In a foreword to a work on the philosophy of religion by one of his former students from Heidelberg, Hermann Friedrich Wilhelm Hinrichs (1794–1861),⁹³ Hegel argues that if we base religion on feeling, then 'a dog would be the best Christian for it possesses this [sc. feeling of dependency] in the highest degree and lives mainly in this feeling.'⁹⁴ Dogs have no rational faculty but live in the realm of immediate appetite and natural impulse. The point is obviously that only humans have religion; therefore, the cognitive faculty that is at work in religious belief must be one that is unique to human beings. To understand faith as feeling means devaluing the concept and reducing it to a base level. The reference to the dog is not merely a polemical quip but is in fact grounded in Hegel's convictions about the nature of the human mind. Only human beings have religion and culture, not animals, and so it follows that it must be some faculty that belongs only to humans that makes this possible.⁹⁵ It would seem to follow from Schleiermacher's claim that a dog would be a great Christian since it is always immediately in the sphere of feeling, and this feeling is not diluted or impaired by reason, which is the province of humans. In this passage Hegel challenges the notion of a pure feeling as such; feelings and thoughts are always related to one another in our complex cognitive life, and it is impossible to distinguish something as a pure feeling with absolutely no content of thought. Moreover, while Hegel acknowledges the role that feeling has to play in the heart of the religious believer, he thinks that it would be absurd to base all of religion on this since such an attempt can only end in absurdity. The goal is to unify these feelings with speculative truths, and thus to show how speculation can in fact function as a defender of religious feeling, but unlike feeling, speculation can demonstrate its lasting truth with the strict necessity of reason. What is required is a conception of Christianity that is dignified and worthy of human beings, and such a conception cannot be based on feeling.

Hegel claims instead that the proper conception of faith is one that recognizes some objective external doctrine. He explains his conception of faith as follows:

For I understand by faith neither the merely subjective state of belief which is restricted to the form of certainty, leaving untouched the nature of the content . . . of belief, nor on the other hand only the *credo*, the church's confession of faith which can be recited and learned by rote without communicating itself to man's innermost self . . . I hold that faith . . . is a unity of both these meanings.⁹⁶

⁹³ Hermann Friedrich Wilhelm Hinrichs, *Die Religion im inneren Verhältnisse zur Wissenschaft*, Heidelberg: Karl Groos 1822. Hegel's foreword appears on pp. i–xxviii of Hinrichs' text.

⁹⁴ Hegel, *MW*, pp. 347–8; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 19.

⁹⁵ Hegel, *EL*, § 2; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 42–3.

⁹⁶ Hegel, *MW*, p. 338; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 4.

Ever the dialectician, Hegel sees faith as containing two aspects—an objective and a subjective side. First, it should be a doctrine that contains an objective content that is agreed upon. This is in a sense the principle of the ancient world or of traditional belief systems. But these traditional systems are mistaken when they try tyrannically to impose themselves on individuals with no recognition of their own individuality. Second, faith involves the assent of the individual believer. This is the principle of the modern world that recognizes and respects the right of the individual to make decisions in such matters. Both of these elements must be present for the correct understanding of belief, and any absolute insistence on either one side or the other leads to misunderstandings. Traditional belief was mistaken when it tried to declare its truth independently of the assent of the individual. The modern conception, to which Schleiermacher falls victim, is mistaken when it tries to insist on the truth of the subjective view of the individual, independent of any rational content. For Hegel, the goal is to unify these two sides by means of proper education and the cultivation of the human mind. In this way the individual comes to recognize the inherent rationality of the general doctrine and freely grants his assent to it. Thus the conflict is avoided. But Hegel argues that it is an absurdity to believe that the solution lies in simply eliminating the content of belief and focusing exclusively on the truth of feeling or subjective conviction.

Second, Hegel believes that Jacobi's and Schleiermacher's views lead to a form of relativism. There is no objective standard for truth or knowledge of the divine, according to their conception, since the locus of truth is found in the heart of each individual. Schleiermacher's view seems to reduce God to being just a feeling, while Jacobi's view reduces God to one's purported immediate knowledge, and in both cases this is something subjective.⁹⁷ Since this knowledge is immediate, it gives the individual a special and irreplaceable role:

This general representation is now an established preconception. It implies that the highest or religious content discloses itself to the human being in the spirit itself, that spirit manifests itself in spirit, *in this my own spirit*, that faith has its root in the inner self or in what is most my own, that my inmost core is inseparable from it.⁹⁸

But as a result there is no external objective truth or standard. For Hegel, this view reduces to a form of subjective irrationality. Schleiermacher opens himself up to this charge in his discussion of religious tolerance, which he believes his view promotes. In agreement with Jacobi, Schleiermacher wishes to resist the 'mania for

⁹⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 159–60; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 70–1.

⁹⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 160; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 70.

system' that he believes distorts and confuses the true nature of religion.⁹⁹ A system, be it philosophical or theological, is always based on certain fundamental principles. It organizes things as best it can based on these principles. But it is obliged to reject and criticize those things that stand in contradiction to them. By contrast, Schleiermacher argues, there is no contradiction in the infinite particularity of religious feelings. All of these can peacefully coexist alongside one another with no contradiction arising.¹⁰⁰

Hegel believes that if no objective content of faith is recognized, then the inevitable result is that the content is merely filled in by the individual in an arbitrary manner. He explains:

Further, it is equally correct to infer that if feeling is made into a principle that determines a content, all that has to be done is to leave it to the individual which feelings he will have; it is an absolute indefiniteness that constitutes the standard and authority, that is, the caprice and inclination of the individual, to be and to do what pleases him and to make himself the oracle for what shall be accepted as true as regards religion, duty, right, and what is fine and noble.¹⁰¹

This then leads to 'conceit' and 'egotism' since it is the individual himself who is given the right to decide on everything based on his own caprice and arbitrary whim, while hypocritically parading under the aegis of religious piety.¹⁰²

Third, since this view tends to be very subjective, it seems to dismiss the Church and all forms of organized religion. The Church appears to be arbitrary and oppressive vis-à-vis the truth of the individual. Hegel argues:

This is the general principle, the way in which religious faith is defined in recent times as immediate intuition, as knowledge within me that absolutely does not come from without. Its effect is utterly to remove all external authority, all alien confirmation. What is to be valid for me must have its confirmation in my own spirit. The impetus can certainly come from without, but the external origin is unimportant. *That I believe is due to the witness of my own spirit.*¹⁰³

In this sense Schleiermacher's view ends up in agreement with the Enlightenment critics of religion, who invariably regarded the Church as a corrupt and oppressive

⁹⁹ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 28; *Über die Religion*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁰ Schleiermacher, *On Religion*, p. 28; *Über die Religion*, p. 64: 'The mania for system does indeed reject what is foreign, even if it is quite conceivable and true, because it could spoil one's own well-formed ranks and disturb the beautiful connections by claiming its place. In this mania lies the seat of contradiction; it must quarrel and persecute; for to the extent that the particular is again related to something individual and finite, the one can indeed destroy the other through its existence. But in the infinite everything finite stands undisturbed alongside one another; all is one, and all is true.'

¹⁰¹ Hegel, *MW*, pp. 348–9; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 21.

¹⁰² Hegel, *MW*, p. 349; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 21–2.

¹⁰³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 160–1; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 70–1.

force that was antithetical to any sense of true piety. Hegel's charge here is in some ways ironic in the sense that one of the goals of Schleiermacher's theology was to establish a foundation for the Church and to unite the different Protestant confessions. But, alas, subjectivity does not provide a stable foundation since it will always vary from individual to individual.

While Schleiermacher attempts to develop a view that will escape the criticisms of the Enlightenment, his cure is, in Hegel's eyes, far worse than the disease. Religion cannot be saved by reducing it to feeling or immediate intuition. On the contrary, this spells the end of any meaningful confession whatsoever. For Hegel, to defend religion or Christianity specifically, one must hold firmly to the traditional dogmas and doctrines and make them the first line of defence. If one capitulates on these at the start, then the battle with the followers of the Enlightenment has already been lost. It is therefore imperative to maintain the specific content of Christianity and argue for its truth.¹⁰⁴

3.6 The Romantics and the Forms of Subjectivity

Hegel also polemicizes against different forms of Romanticism that can be regarded in some ways as in line with Schleiermacher. He tends to associate Schleiermacher's view with that of the latter's well-known associate Friedrich von Schlegel, whom Hegel singles out for special criticism.¹⁰⁵ In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel puts Schleiermacher and Schlegel under the category of the followers of Fichte, who, he believes, began the movement towards subjectivism and relativism.¹⁰⁶ Like Schleiermacher, the Romantics rejected reason and instead appealed to feeling as the proper faculty of religious faith. They also in a sense took their point of departure from Kant, claiming that it was impossible to have access to the divine by means of reason or understanding. Rather, they argued, immediate feeling was the faculty that made belief possible.

Hegel is critical of this view since, he believes, it leads to a form of relativism. There is no objective standard for truth or knowledge of the divine, according to this conception, since the locus of truth is found in the heart of each individual. Since this knowledge is immediate, it gives the individual a special and irreplaceable role. According to Hegel, the consent of the individual and conscience is a key feature of the modern world. In ancient cultures the individual was not recognized as being valid with respect to questions of morals, laws, customs, etc. Instead it was the established objective sphere of such things which ruled with an iron hand. If

¹⁰⁴ Hegel, *MW*, p. 350; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 23: 'But as regards what is needed at the present time, the need common to religion and philosophy is a *substantial objective content for truth*.'

¹⁰⁵ Hegel, *MW*, p. 349; *Jub.*, vol. 20, p. 22. *PR*, § 140(f); *Jub.*, vol. 7, pp. 217–19.

¹⁰⁶ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 506–10; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 641–5.

accepted custom or law dictated that one do something, for example, take up the profession of one's father or marry someone that one's family had selected, then one did it, and one's own wishes and desires played no role in the situation. The individual did not count for much. For Hegel, it is a great breakthrough in the development of spirit that in the modern world the validity of the individual has come to be recognized. Today we believe that the assent of the individual is necessary for belief, and it is wrong to compel or coerce people to do something against their conscience. The individual is now thought to be able to evaluate a given law, custom, or belief and grant his assent if it is rational. For Hegel, this means that there is an objective content external to the individual that one must take a stand on. We give our assent when we realize that the content is rational and thus in accordance with our rational will. It is regarded as being objective. With education and proper upbringing, one naturally comes to see the truth and rationality of this objective sphere, and when one reaches the age of reflection and contemplates such things for oneself, then one gives one's assent to them and complies with them. In this sense the right of the individual is recognized. But the conception of individuality and conscience that one finds in the Romantics is quite different from this. They do not recognize the pre-existing objective sphere of customs and ethics; on the contrary, this is what they ironically ridicule. They place the entire focus on the individual's will and free choice. But this is empty of content and leads to arbitrariness. Instead of taking his truth from the objective sphere outside himself, the individual props himself up as the standard for truth and objectivity. For Hegel, this is a perversion of the modern principle of subjective freedom. Assent or conscience only makes sense when it is related to something concrete with a determinate content. But when assent itself becomes the key, independent of any content, a number of problems arise.

This issue took on a sense of urgency during Hegel's initial years in Berlin when the Prussian authorities were increasingly alarmed at the growing student movement in the German states, which was highlighted by the Wartburg Festival of 1817. The assembled students demanded, among other things, a union of all the German-speaking states, a constitutional monarchy, and democracy. As this movement gained momentum, some of the students became radicalized, and the authorities feared that they would come to represent a real revolutionary force. One of the students Karl Ludwig Sand (1795–1820) was influenced by Romantic thinking and felt that his strong beliefs and convictions justified the use of violence. In 1819 Sand murdered the reactionary writer August von Kotzebue, who was universally reviled by the student movement as a Russian agent and a traitor. This act seemed to confirm the fears of the political authorities throughout the German states, who hastened to introduce new repressive measures to prevent the spread of radical sentiment. Representatives from the different German states issued the Karlsbad Decrees, which aimed to put an end to the fraternities (the *Burschenschaften*) and student political associations. They also called for closer

censorship and state control of the universities. Hegel's colleague in Berlin, the theologian Wilhelm de Wette, was suspended from teaching for sympathizing with the students.¹⁰⁷ De Wette had met Sand previously in Heidelberg and, after the murder, had written an ill-advised letter of condolence to his mother, in which he tried to justify the murder based on Sand's conviction of his own good intentions.¹⁰⁸ When the letter was discovered, De Wette was obliged to step down from his professorship in Berlin. The murder of Kotzebue quickly became a *cause célèbre* that was much discussed among academics. The affair ended with the condemnation and execution of Sand in 1820.¹⁰⁹ Subsequently much material about the affair was published that gave a clear picture of the mindset and motivation of Sand.¹¹⁰ The fanatic Sand and his sympathizers thought that the strength of his belief that he was doing the right thing justified his actions.

Like everyone else at the time, Hegel followed these events with a sense of horror and disgust.¹¹¹ This illustrated for him the absurdity of the Romantics' exclusive focus on form at the expense of content. Although the *content* of Sand's action, that is, murder, was both illegal and immoral by any standard, it was argued that the *form* of Sand's belief offset this. For Hegel, this example demonstrated clearly the absurdities to which things lead when content is disregarded. The absence of determinate content can be filled in by anything at all, even by crimes and acts of

¹⁰⁷ See John Rogerson, *W. M. L. de Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1992, pp. 149–59. Max Lenz, *Geschichte der Königlichen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Berlin*, vols 1–4, Halle: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses 1910–18, vol. 2.1, pp. 34–83.

¹⁰⁸ See Rogerson, *W. M. L. de Wette, Founder of Modern Biblical Criticism: An Intellectual Biography*, pp. 153–5.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Henrich Steffens, *Über Kotzebue's Ermordung*, Breslau: Joseph Max 1819. Johann Friedrich Gottlieb Lehmann, *Beleuchtung einiger Urtheile über Kotzebue's Ermordung*, Bartenstein in Ostpreußen: Werner 1819. Hartwig von Hundt-Radowsky, *Kotzebue's Ermordung in Hinsicht ihrer Ursachen und ihrer wahrscheinlichen literarischen Folgen für Deutschland*, Berlin: Neue Berlinische Buchhandlung 1819. Ludwig de Marées, *Ueber Kotzebue's Ermordung und deren Veranlassung. Mit einigen Bemerkungen über Deutschlands Universitäts- und Gemein-Wesen*, Deßau: Christian Georg Ackermann 1819. Friedrich Wilhelm Carové, *Ueber die Ermordung Kotzebue's*, Eisenach: Johann Friedrich Bärecke 1819. Carl Nicolai, *Authentischer Bericht über die Ermordung des Kaiserlich-Russischen Staatsraths Herrn August von Kotzebue; nebst vielen interessanten Notizen über ihn und über Carl Sand, den Meuchelmörder*, Mannheim: n.p. 1819. Anonymous, *Die wichtigsten Lebensmomente Karl Ludwig Sand's aus Wunsiedel*, Nürnberg: in der Rasperschen Kunst- und Buchhandlung 1819. Anonymous, *Nachtrag zu den wichtigsten Lebensmomenten Karl Ludwig Sand's aus Wunsiedel mit der vollständigen Erzählung seiner Hinrichtung am 20. Mai 1820*, Nürnberg: in der Rasperschen Kunst- und Buchhandlung 1820.

¹¹⁰ See, for example, Karl Levin von Hohnhorst (ed.), *Vollständige Uebersicht der gegen Carl Ludwig Sand wegen Meuchelmordes verübt an dem K[aiserlich]. Russischen Staatsrath v. Kotzebue geführten Untersuchung. Aus den Originalakten*, Stuttgart and Tübingen: in der J. G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung 1820. Robert Wesselhöft (ed.), *Carl Ludwig Sand, dargestellt durch seine Tagebücher und Briefe von einigen seiner Freunde*, Altenburg: Christian Hahn 1821. Anonymous, *Noch acht Beiträge zur Geschichte August von Kotzebues und C. L. Sands. Aus öffentlichen Nachrichten zusammengestellt*, Mühlhausen: im Verlag der typographische Societät 1821. Friedrich Cramer (ed.), *Acten-Auszüge aus dem Untersuchungs-Process über Carl Ludwig Sand; nebst anderen Materialien zur Beurtheilung desselben und August von Kotzebue*, Altenburg, Leipzig: im Verlag des literarischen Comptoirs 1821.

¹¹¹ See Adriaan Theodoor Peperzak, *Philosophy and Politics: A Commentary on the Preface to Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff 1987, pp. 15–31.

fanaticism. For Hegel, the content itself must be something rational, and only with the balance of content and form was rational action possible.

Hegel polemicalizes against the student movement in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right*.¹¹² However, he gives a more detailed criticism of the Romantic ways of thinking in § 140 at the end of the second part of the work, entitled 'Morality'. There he goes through different forms of Romantic subjectivism and attempts to set up a typology in ascending order. In this analysis Hegel reworks some of the material that he had originally explored critically in the 'Reason' and 'Spirit' chapters of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

(A) *Acting with a Guilty Conscience*. For Hegel, ethical decision-making concerns the relation of our private desires and the good. Our desires represent something particular and arbitrary, whereas the good is universal. If we choose our own private desire over the universal, then this is immoral. The first stage of subjectivism involves knowing the universal good, but at the same time willing or doing the particular. Hegel describes the three moments of this form of subjectivity as follows: '(α) knowledge of the true universal, whether in the form merely of a feeling of *right* and *duty* or of a more advanced knowledge and cognition of these; (β) a willing of the *particular* which is at odds with this universal; and (γ) a knowing *comparison* of these two moments so that the particular volition is determined, for the willing consciousness itself, as evil.'¹¹³ This form of subjectivism is the least egregious since, given that the individual acts with a guilty conscience, there is an implicit admission of wrongdoing and a recognition of a truth external to the subject. The individual knows full well what the good is and makes no attempt to deny it. He is simply overcome by the power of his own arbitrary desires. The individual is thus caught in an inward contradiction with what he knows full well to be the correct course of action.

(B) *Hypocrisy: Presenting Evil Actions to Others as Good*. This second stage involves the contradiction of the first but extends it by an attempt to convince others that the evil action is in fact good. Thus, the condition for hypocrisy is first that one acts with a guilty conscious, knowing the universal by acting on the particular, and second, presenting that action to others as good, while one knows all the while that this is not the case. This second level involves lying and deception about the nature of one's act. Hegel explains this as follows:

Hypocrisy includes in addition the formal determination of untruthfulness, whereby *evil* is in the first place represented *for others* as *good* and the evildoer pretends in all external respects to be good, conscientious, pious, etc.—which in this case is merely a trick to deceive *others*. But secondly, the evil person may find

¹¹² Hegel, *PR* Preface, pp. 15–16; *Jub.*, vol. 7, pp. 26–8.

¹¹³ Hegel, *PR*, § 140(a); *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 205.

in the good he does at other times, or in his piety, or in *good reasons* of any kind, a means of justifying *for himself* the evil he does, in that he can use these reasons to distort it into something he considers good.¹¹⁴

This second stage is a logical next step from the first one. It is uncomfortable to be in an inward contradiction and to have a guilty conscience. There is a natural sense of embarrassment and shame about this when others find out about it. Their moral reproaches merely heighten one's own guilty conscience by constantly reminding one of the true good, which one has disregarded. In order to avoid these reproaches, the individual thus attempts to portray himself as having done nothing wrong. We all are familiar with these kinds of arguments: this is what anyone would have done in my position or this is what everyone does. With appeals to what others would have done, the implication is that one truly did act in accordance with the universal. Hegel also points out the well-known diversionary tactic of ignoring the actual action under critique and pointing to other instances where one did the right thing. The idea is that if one can get the critics to agree that one has acted correctly in these other cases, they will forget the dubious action at issue. This second stage logically depends on the first since hypocrisy depends on a guilty conscience in the sense that one must first feel the pangs of a guilty conscience before one can be hypocritical. The stage of hypocrisy represents a higher form of evil, for Hegel, since it adds to the initial infraction and contradiction the element of lies.

(C) *Probabilism*. This third stage can be seen as a specific form of hypocrisy in its attempt to present an evil action as something good. According to this view, an action is good if one can find any good reason for it whatsoever, even if there are numerous objections and counterarguments to it. The idea is that one cannot be held responsible for evil actions if one acted on reasons that were *probably* good. Hegel describes this as follows:

It adopts the principle that an action is permissible and can be done in good conscience if the consciousness can discover *any* good reason for it—even if this is merely the *authority* of a single theologian, and even if other theologians are known to diverge very considerably from the former's judgment.¹¹⁵

Probabilism levels all moral theory to a common mean without any distinction between better or worse arguments since almost any action can be justified by appeal to some authority if one looks long enough for such an authority. There still remain some traces of objectivity in this view since it is 'conceded that a good reason is merely of such a kind that other reasons of at least equal merit may exist

¹¹⁴ Hegel, *PR*, § 140(b); *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 207.

¹¹⁵ Hegel, *PR*, § 140(c); *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 207.

alongside it' and 'it assumes that a *reason* should be the determining factor.'¹¹⁶ There is thus still a vestige of respect for the objective realm. Hegel writes, 'the fact that it is the agent's own subjectivity which makes the decision is not yet acknowledged as the principle—on the contrary... it is claimed that a reason is the decisive factor.'¹¹⁷ The probabilist still agrees with everyone else that the universal is what is true but sets up a very weak standard for reaching it by his appeal to any arbitrary authority. Since the advocate of probabilism keeps up the pretence of objectivity with his faith in the authority of good reasons, he does not admit that his view is in fact a subjectivism, and hence probabilism is a form of hypocrisy.

(D) *Willing the Good*. According to this view, morality consists simply in willing the good, regardless of the actual contents of that good or its results. The target of Hegel's criticism seems at least in part to be Kant's moral theory with its claim that an action is good only insofar as it is done with good will and out of respect for the universal moral law.¹¹⁸ The contradiction here lies in the fact that the individual must give one's will some concrete content. Simply to will the good in the abstract is empty, especially when one performs dubious, immoral, or illegal actions under the banner of having good intent or meaning well. In this way one can always justify theft, murder, and any other crime by appeal to some positive aspect in the action. Since all people presumably will the good in the abstract, it would be impossible to find an evil action. On this view, the worst crimes could always be justified with the claim that one meant well. For this reason Hegel critically mentions in this context the slogan, 'the end justifies the means.' The difficulty here is to determine how one's individual will and action match the universal. This is a point that Kant struggles with as he tries to develop different tests for determining if one's intention matches the true moral law. Hegel's point is that these tests always seem to fall short since the nature of the moral law is too abstract and can never be clearly and unambiguously applied to specific actions in the world, which are always complex due to their specific concrete nature. From any given abstract law or principle a number of different and even contradictory actions can be derived.

(E) *The Law of the Heart*. According to the next stage of subjectivity, the ethical nature of the action is determined by the conviction which holds it. In other words, if one is truly convinced of the truth and righteousness of one's action, then it is true and righteous. Once again it will be noted that the actual content of what one wills remains abstract and wholly indeterminate. The sole criterion is that one

¹¹⁶ Hegel, *PR*, § 140(c); *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 207–8.

¹¹⁷ Hegel, *PR*, § 140(c); *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 208.

¹¹⁸ See Sally S. Sedgwick, 'Hegel's Critique of the Subjective Idealism of Kant's Ethics,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 26, 1988, pp. 89–105. Kenneth R. Westphal, 'Hegel's Critique of Kant's Moral World View,' *Philosophical Topics*, vol. 19, 1991, pp. 133–76. David Hoy, 'Hegel's Critique of Kantian Morality,' *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 6, 1989, pp. 207–32.

is convinced that one is doing the right thing. Here, in contrast to hypocrisy, there is no longer any recognition of anything objective in the ethical sphere. A guilty conscience is impossible here since there is no universal to contradict one's action and conviction. There is no factual truth of the matter outside the individual, and thus the only thing that one has to go on is subjective conviction. But one can be subjectively convinced of anything at all. Hegel's critical point here is that no obligatory force can come from one's own subjective will; instead, this can only derive from some objective universal.

This position represents a further development of subjectivism from the previous stage in the following way: the Kantian doctrine of willing the good struggles with the inability to show the connection between the abstract, universal good and one's particular action and thus ends with the view that one need only act with good will. Although the Kantian doctrine concedes that there are epistemological problems involved in figuring out whether one's action aligns with the universal, that is, the categorical imperative, it holds firm on the point that such a universal exists. This is what dissolves here at this fourth stage of subjectivism. This is more radical than the previous view since the individual at this stage does not acknowledge that there is any kind of external good but is solely focused on the subjective willing. The first four forms of subjectivism all accepted the existence of a universal in the realm of morality. Due to this it is possible to point out a contradiction in their view when the specific action or act of willing is inconsistent with the universal. This new view, however, openly accepts relativism and renders all contradiction impossible. This position of subjectivity corresponds to what Hegel calls 'the law of the heart' in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹¹⁹ In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* this view is also critically treated.¹²⁰

A part of the criticism of this view seems to be aimed at Jakob Friedrich Fries, who, like De Wette, also lost his position due to his association with Sand and his sympathy with the student movement.¹²¹ This view of the law of the heart perhaps comes closest to that of Sand in his murder of Kotzebue in the name of the good. His good intention is thus thought to offset what is clearly and unambiguously a crime. This shows how ludicrous it is to claim that one need only will the good to make the action good. It will be noted here that there is a shift from the objectively recognized good to the intention and will of the individual. Thus, this represents yet another step on the way towards subjectivism.

¹¹⁹ See 'The Law of the Heart and the Frenzy of Self-Conceit' from the 'Reason' Chapter (*PhS*, pp. 221–8; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 283–92).

¹²⁰ See *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 390–6; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 285–91.

¹²¹ See Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2002, pp. 199–211. Willem van Dooren, 'Hegel und Fries,' *Kantstudien*, vol. 61, 1970, pp. 217–26. Jacques D'Hondt, *Hegel in his Time: Berlin 1818–1831*, trans. by John Burbidge with Nelson Roland and Judith Levasseur, Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview 1988, pp. 83–99.

(F) *Irony*. Here we find Hegel's criticism primarily of Friedrich von Schlegel but also of Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger.¹²² Irony represents for Hegel the most profound and pernicious form of subjectivism. It differs from the previous stage in its self-conscious awareness of its containing the truth within itself and its personal conviction. Hegel explains, 'The only possible culmination... of that subjectivity which regards itself as the ultimate instance is reached when it *knows* itself as that power of resolution and decision on matters of truth, right, and duty which is already implicitly present within the previous forms.'¹²³ At this stage the individual ironically criticizes and distances himself from all established customs, ethics, laws, traditions, etc. This is a part of the Romantics' critique of bourgeois culture and values. The ironist believes that the sole locus of truth and justice is his own mind. He is thus at liberty to create and change ethical views and precepts *ad libitum* as the situation and his own mood dictate. The first four forms of subjectivism still felt a sense of shame and the need to justify their actions to the world. They thus implicitly recognized the objective sphere of ethics. By contrast, here the ironist blatantly and overtly rejects the commonly accepted ethical rules and standards. Here the individual arrogantly places his own arbitrary whims and views over the authority of custom, tradition, and legal authority. The ironic attitude works at the same level as the relativism of the previous stage insofar as both deny universal moral principles. However, these two final forms of subjectivism diverge since the law of the heart is able to maintain a radically individualistic moral system which has its own inner consistency, whereas the ironic attitude rejects all forms of morality and feels free to play with them by changing one's views arbitrarily from one moment to the next. Hegel refers to this form of subjectivity as 'the beautiful soul', a term he used in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹²⁴ It should be noted that Schlegel's use of irony was later taken up for criticism by Søren Kierkegaard, who, in his work *The Concept of Irony*, follows Hegel's analysis closely.¹²⁵

¹²² See Paul Tillich, *Perspectives on 19th and 20th Century Protestant Theology*, pp. 89–90.

¹²³ Hegel, *PR*, § 140(f); *Jub.*, vol. 7, pp. 217–19.

¹²⁴ See 'Conscience. The "Beautiful Soul," Evil and its Forgiveness' from the 'Spirit' Chapter (*PhS*, pp. 383–409; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 484–516). J. Y. Calvez, 'L'âge d'or. Essai sur le destin de la "belle âme" chez Novalis et Hegel,' *Études Germaniques*, vol. 9, 1954, pp. 112–27. Daniel O. Dahlstrom, 'Die schöne Seele bei Schiller und Hegel,' *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, 1991, pp. 147–56. Emanuel Hirsch, 'Die Beisetzung der Romantiker in Hegels *Phänomenologie*. Ein Kommentar zu dem Abschnitte über die Moralität,' *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 2, 1924, pp. 510–32 (reprinted in *Materialien zu Hegels Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. by Hans Friedrich Fulda and Dieter Henrich, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1973, pp. 245–75). Karlheinz Well, *Die schöne Seele und ihre sittliche Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Peter Lang 1986.

¹²⁵ See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, trans. by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1989, pp. 286–301. See also Jon Stewart, *Søren Kierkegaard: Subjectivity, Irony and the Crisis of Modernity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015. K. Brian Soderquist, *The Isolated Self: Truth and Untruth in Søren Kierkegaard's 'On the Concept of Irony'*, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel 2007 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 1).

While in this section of the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel's concern is with morality, the same set of problems arises in the sphere of religion, where, as we have seen, it concerns the issue of the content of belief. In both cases it concerns a denial that anything outside oneself has truth. This means a rejection of all religious dogmas and a dismissal of the Church and all forms of organized religion, which are regarded as repressive to individual development and creativity. Thus the Romantics reject any form of authority. According to Hegel, to regard the external world as an oppressive authority is a misconception. Authority can also be valuable and completely valid on the condition that its content is rational, and the individual can thereby give his assent to it. Hegel believed that the forms of subjectivity and relativism he sketched here were becoming widespread in his own day, and this explains part of his motivation to combat them both in the sphere of ethics and of religion.

3.7 Hegel's Philosophy of Religion and Romanticism

The Enlightenment's rejection of traditional religious doctrines and dogmas set up the conditions for the subjectivism of Romanticism. At the end of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel explicitly describes the forms of religious subjectivism and relativism that have been characterized here under the general rubric of Romanticism.¹²⁶ This description comes immediately after his description of the Enlightenment, and it is clear that these are two modern tendencies of thought that he wants to criticize. Since there was no longer any meaningful content in religion but only a very abstract and distant deity about which one could know nothing, it was natural that religious believers simply filled in the content with their own intuitions.¹²⁷ But with this there was a clear shift from what had once been objective, recognized doctrines, to subjective opinions and views, from which sprang the various Romantic theories about the conscience, the heart, feeling, inwardness, etc.

One basic goal of Hegel's philosophy of religion is to find a solution for this situation, which he regards as acute in his own time. He realizes that it is impossible to turn back the clock and return to traditional faith, but yet he regards it as imperative to restore some objective content to religion if the age is not to sink into a morass of subjectivism and relativism. The then current crisis of religious content motivated him to explore what he took to be unique and special about Christianity in contrast to the other world religions. The advances in the different

¹²⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 343–4; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 266–7. Here Hegel uses the label 'Pietism', but it is clear from his description that he has a much broader view in mind.

¹²⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 345; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 267–8: 'The Enlightenment of the understanding and Pietism volatilize all content. The purely subjective standpoint recognizes no content and hence no truth.'

fields of Asian studies provided him with rich material about the content of the other religions. When he turned to give his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he thus threw himself into this material and used it to construct a detailed narrative of the development of the world religions.¹²⁸ It is by means of this narrative that he attempted to show the importance of content in religious thinking. At the beginning of each of his accounts of the world religions, Hegel attempts to define the specific concept of the divine that characterizes the individual religion. This means that these different concepts can be studied and compared. Each religion has its own idea with a wealth of content. This content is accessible to us by means of, for example, religious art or sacred texts. So it is absurd to say that nothing can be known about God. We need only look at the different conceptions of the divine of the different peoples of the world to know how they conceived of their gods. So Christianity also has its content that is also readily accessible to anyone familiar with the Christian tradition. Hegel's goal is to examine this content with a philosophical eye and to demonstrate that it contains a philosophical truth.

¹²⁸ See Jon Stewart, *Hegel's Interpretation of the Religions of the World: The Logic of the Gods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018. *Hegel's Philosophy of the Historical Religions*, ed. by Bart Labuschagne and Timo Slootweg, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2012.

Hegel's Approach and Method

Hegel developed his own approach to religion in large part in response to the views coming from the Enlightenment and Romanticism. He was critical of different aspects of these movements, which he saw as undermining the truth of religion. In the present chapter we wish to examine his critical intuitions vis-à-vis these views. The key will be to get straight about what he identifies as the principal errors of his day and how he intends to correct them. In addition, we need to come to terms with his methodology for understanding the large and complex cultural phenomenon known as religion. We wish to explore, among other things, how he proposes to make a defence of Christianity by means of his method.

4.1 The Criticism of the Enlightenment: Ignorance of the Divine

The followers of the Enlightenment aimed to eliminate superstition by examining religion with the faculty of critical reason. Knowledge was the result of an empirical investigation of the world, and it was impossible to demonstrate the existence of God in this way. The closest that one could come to this was the watchmaker argument, which seemed to give some empirical evidence that there was a creator of the universe, but nothing more could be said about this entity. The result was that it was generally accepted among scholars that while God existed, He could not be known, and all claims to do so were regarded as based on fallacious reasoning.

Hegel takes it to be a defining characteristic of his own day that there is great pride taken in the advances of the empirical sciences and the knowledge attained by them; here he is presumably thinking about things such as the invention of the microscope or the improvements in the telescope that opened up vast new spheres of human sense experience. Despite this richness of new empirical knowledge, it is equally a point of pride that it was claimed that nothing can be known about God. He formulates this somewhat paradoxically as follows:

The more the cognition of finite things is expanded—and the extension of the sciences has now become almost boundless, all fields of knowledge (having enlarged [their scope] beyond all compass)—the more the sphere of the knowledge of God has contracted. There was a time when all (science) was a science of

God. It is the distinction of our age, by contrast, to know each and every thing, indeed to know an infinite mass of objects, but only of God to know nothing.¹

Hegel takes this result to be an unhappy conjunction of certain philosophical theories, which lead to skepticism about God, and the view of empiricism, for which only evidence based on experience counts as demonstration. He believes that it became a mark of the fashionable skeptical disposition during the Enlightenment to hold the view that nothing could be known about the divine. This showed that one was savvy to the critical spirit of the age. He explains: 'It is no longer a grief to our age that it knows nothing of God; rather it counts as the highest insight that this cognition is not even possible.'² The advocates of the Enlightenment thus look down on religious believers with condescension, regarding them as naïve, backward, and superstitious.

But, for Hegel, the view of the Enlightenment is both confused and unchristian. He believes that Christianity commands one to know God, and on this point he takes his philosophy to be in complete harmony with Christian doctrine: 'What the Christian religion (like all religions) proclaims as the supreme, the absolute commandment, "Ye shall know God," is now accounted mere folly.'³ One reads further, the current view of our ignorance of God is 'directly opposed to the whole nature of the Christian religion, according to which we should *know* God *cognitively*, God's nature and essence, and should esteem this cognition above all else.'⁴ In this context he also refers to Matthew 5:48 as evidence of his claim: 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'⁵ Just as God knows, so also should humans know.

Hegel's central argument against the prevailing view is that a key feature of Christianity is the Revelation: God revealed Himself to human beings. Given this, it is difficult to understand, Hegel believes, how it can be claimed that He cannot be known.⁶ God revealed Himself precisely in order to be known:

In the Christian religion God has revealed Himself—that is, He has given us to understand what He is; so that He is no longer a concealed or secret existence.

¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 86–7; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 6.

² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 87; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 6.

³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 87; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 6.

⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 88; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 7. He also takes up this issue in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, where he argues: 'I have implicitly touched upon a prominent question of the day; namely, that of the possibility of knowing God: or rather—since public opinion has ceased to allow it to be a matter of *question*—the *doctrine* that it is impossible to know God. In direct contravention of what is commanded in Holy Scripture as the highest duty—that we should not merely love, but *know* God—the prevalent dogma involves the denial of what is there said; namely, that it is the Spirit that leads into truth, knows all things, penetrates even into the deep things of the Godhead.' *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 14; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 40–1.

⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 88; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 7.

⁶ This was an important element in Hegel's criticism of Kant, which was explored in Chapter 2, Section 2.4 above.

And this possibility of knowing Him, thus afforded us, renders such knowledge a duty. God wishes no narrow-hearted souls or empty heads for His children, but those whose spirit is of itself indeed, poor, but rich in the knowledge of Him; and who regard this knowledge of God as the only valuable possession.⁷

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* Hegel traces the different forms of revelation and hiddenness in the different world religions, and the fact that God reveals himself in Christ is perhaps the single most important point that makes Christianity what it is. God does not wish to remain hidden or unknown.⁸ The Revelation is ample demonstration that God can in fact be known. Thus to say that we nonetheless can know nothing about him is absurd, when in fact we know rather a lot about the Revelation of Christ in his life and teachings.

But the problem is much broader than just one concerning the existence and nature of God; indeed, due to the criticisms of the Enlightenment, Hegel believes that in his day all of the traditional doctrines and dogmas of Christianity have been watered down, thinned out, and for all intents and purposes abandoned. The critical eye of the Enlightenment thinkers has made belief in individual dogmas implausible. Again by requiring demonstration by means of empirical evidence alone, these thinkers reduced the doctrines of religion to absurdity. Hegel believes that the theologians themselves are in large part responsible for this. Under the captivating spell of modern science, they have in the course of time implicitly relinquished one doctrine after another, capitulating to the criticisms of the sciences:

In recent theology very few of the dogmas of the earlier systems of ecclesiastical confessions have survived or at least retained the importance previously attributed to them, and others have not been set in their place. One could easily arrive at the view that a widespread, nearly universal indifference toward the doctrines of faith formerly regarded as essential has entered into the general religiousness of the public.⁹

⁷ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 15; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 41.

⁸ See Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 246; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 175: 'Philosophy knows God essentially as concrete, as the spiritual, realized universality that is not jealous but communicates itself. Even light communicates itself. Whoever says that God cannot be cognized is saying that God is jealous, and is not making a serious effort to achieve cognition when he speaks of God.'

⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 156; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 66–7. See also *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 157; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 67: 'the most weighty doctrines have lost much of their interest, faith in the Trinity, for example, or the miracles in the Old and New Testaments, etc.' See also *Phil. of Mind*, § 445, Addition; *Jub.*, vol. 10, p. 312: 'For although even those theologians who declare God to be unknowable go to a great deal of trouble exegetical, critical, and historical about him and in this way expand theology into a complex detailed science, yet in their hands the science gets no further than a knowledge of externals, for they throw out the substantial content of their subject matter as indigestible by their weak minds and accordingly renounce all claim to a *cognition* of God, since, as we have said, a knowledge of externals does not suffice for cognition, which requires a grasp of the substantial, specific nature of the subject matter.'

He goes on to mention a number of examples of doctrines which have fallen into discredit: the Trinity, the Resurrection of the body, the divinity of Christ, eternal salvation, etc.

Clear testimony to the fact that the traditional dogmas no longer carry any force of conviction is that they are, according to Hegel, consigned to being a subject of purely historical study.¹⁰ In seminaries and faculties of theology students dutifully learn about the Church Councils and study the arguments that took place at them. But in this way the dogmas that are discussed are attributed to people who lived in the past. They are thus not a part of the living religious belief of the moment. The issues are generally regarded as not being of any relevance in the present. If this is what theology is about, then it is only concerned with the finite, that is, details of historical knowledge, and not with the infinite, that is, God. Although the theologians can make a show of great erudition in their detailed knowledge of the Church Councils, they know nothing of God. In this sense Hegel sees theology in his own day as having betrayed its very office.

The result of the criticism of the advocates of the Enlightenment is a reduction of the content of religion. Nothing determinate can be known about God or the key dogmas. Hegel explicitly compares the Enlightenment with what he regards as genuine philosophy on this point concerning the correct conception of religion:

The . . . opposition is between philosophy and the Enlightenment. Philosophy is opposed to the attitude of indifference toward the content; it is opposed to mere opinion, to the despair involved in its renunciation of the truth, and to the view that it does not matter what content is intended. The goal of philosophy is the cognition of the truth—the cognition of God because he is the absolute truth . . . The Enlightenment—that vanity of understanding—is the most vehement opponent of philosophy. It takes it very ill when philosophy demonstrates the rational content in the Christian religion, when it shows that the witness of the Spirit, the truth in the most all-embracing sense of the term is deposited in religion.¹¹

While the Enlightenment empties religion of its content, philosophy tries to understand it by grasping the rational element in this content.

Controversially, Hegel claims that the function that philosophy can serve is to save religion from the neglect it suffers at the hands of the theologians. It can restore knowledge of God and the traditional dogmas and thereby put religion back onto a firm footing. Philosophy can help to liberate religion from the sad state that it has fallen into. In order to do this, philosophy must paradoxically save religion from its ostensible defenders, the theologians: 'the fact is that in recent

¹⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 128; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 44. *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 158; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 68.

¹¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 246–7; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 175.

times philosophy has been obliged to defend the domain of religion against the attacks of several theological systems.¹² This is a highly provocative claim that surely irritated many theologians. But, indeed, Hegel makes it an overt point on his agenda to restore the lost doctrines for theology.

4.2 The Criticism of Romanticism: The Split between Thinking and Feeling

Since, according to the advocates of the Enlightenment, God could not be demonstrated by empirical evidence and scientific reasoning, this led thinkers of the Romantic movement to the conclusion that everything having to do with the divine and religion belonged to the realm of subjectivity, inwardness, and feeling. Nothing outwardly could be demonstrated in the objective sphere, and so, it was thought, the realm of religion must belong to the inward, subjective sphere. This leads to the view, still quite widespread today, that it is impossible to discuss religion or to argue for or against the existence of God since these are inward matters of the heart that cannot be demonstrated objectively or discursively. Therefore, there opened up a radical split between thinking and feeling. The realm of science and discursive rationality was that of thought, which was concerned with objective things, whereas the realm of religion was that of feeling or inward subjectivity. Hegel regards this as another disastrous feature of contemporary thinking.

As a dialectical thinker, Hegel opposes the radical division between thought and feeling. His initial intuition is the idealist claim that thinking is at the heart of the different human spheres of activity. The arts, the sciences, legal systems, and governments are all the products of the collective human mind or 'spirit'. They develop in different contexts in different places through the centuries. In the course of this development, they take on different characteristics and shapes. Religion constitutes an aspect of human culture as well. Like the other spheres of spirit, it too develops in the different peoples and places through time. Like the other spheres of spirit, it can also be made the object of study and knowledge. Human beings are characterized by spirit, and every sphere of their lives is permeated by it: 'Human beings are truly human through consciousness—by virtue of the fact that they think and by virtue of the fact that they are spirit. This gives rise to manifold images and configurations, i.e., the sciences, the arts, political interests, the relationships that are connected with human freedom and will.'¹³

¹² Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 15; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 41.

¹³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 113–14; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 31.

Hegel is quick to reject the view that religion is concerned with some unique or special faculty, for example, feeling or immediate knowing, whereas philosophy is concerned with thought. In the *Encyclopedia*, he refers to

the prejudice of our day and age, which separates feeling and thinking from each other in such a way that they are supposedly opposed to each other, and are even so hostile that feeling—religious feeling in particular—is contaminated, perverted, or even totally destroyed by thinking, and that religion and religiosity essentially do not have their root and their place in thinking.¹⁴

According to the Romantic account, feeling is regarded as the most important element of the individual. Hegel attempts to refute the view of the split between faith and reason as follows:

Making a separation of this kind means forgetting that only man is capable of religion, and that the lower animals have no religion, any more than right and morality belong to them . . . Religion, right, and ethical life belong to man alone, and that only because he is a thinking essence. For that reason *thinking* in its broad sense has not been inactive in these spheres, even at the level of feeling and belief or of representation; the activity and productions of thinking are *present* in them and are *included* in them.¹⁵

Religion belongs uniquely to human beings, and from this it follows that it must imply the cognitive faculty unique to human beings: thought. One recalls Hegel's famous criticism of Schleiermacher for making feeling the organ of religious faith. This is also relevant for Hegel's criticism of Jacobi's view of a precognitive immediate knowing that is different from our usual ways of knowing.

Hegel further argues that the misunderstanding arises from the fact that when people hear the claim that religion, right, and ethics are essentially concerned with thought, they mistakenly take it to mean that conscious reflection is always at work in these different spheres. Instead, Hegel's thesis is that a necessary *logos* or reason is always present and developing in these different contexts, regardless of how reflective particular individuals may or may not be. The rich content of religion is contained in the spirit of a people. Here Hegel is paradoxically in

¹⁴ Hegel, *EL*, § 2; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 42.

¹⁵ Hegel, *EL*, § 2; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 42–3. For Hegel's critical discussion of the split between faith and knowledge, see also his 'Aphorismen über Nichtwissen und absolutes Wissen im Verhältnisse zur christlichen Glaubenserkenntnis. —Ein Beitrag zum Verständnisse der Philosophie unserer Zeit. Von Carl Friederich G. . . . I.—Berlin, bei E. Franklin. 1829,' *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, 1829, nos 99–102, pp. 789–816; nos 105–6, pp. 833–5; see pp. 813–14. Reprinted in *Vermischte Schriften*, vols 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Förster and Ludwig Boumann, vols 16–17 (1834–35) in *Hegel's Werke*, vol. 17, pp. 111–48, see pp. 141–2. (In English as 'Review of K. F. Göschel's *Aphorisms*,' in *MW*, pp. 401–29, see pp. 423ff.; *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 276–313, see pp. 306–7.)

agreement with the Romantics who were interested in reviving a national spirit by studying German folk songs, folk tales, and fairy tales, which they regarded as reflecting the common cultural heritage of the German people. But at the same time he is vehemently opposed to their reduction of all religious content to the realm of subjectivity.

4.3 The Problem of Content

The negative result to which the Romantic emphasis on feeling leads is the elimination of any concrete content in faith. This is something that Romanticism has in common with the Enlightenment. For the advocates of the Enlightenment it was the inability of religion to defend itself in terms of science that led to the elimination of its key doctrines and ended in a position of skepticism or agnosticism. For Romanticism, the focus on feeling and the individual eliminated the objective content of religion and transferred everything to the sphere of personal feeling, inwardness and subjectivity. Since feeling can be related to any kind of content, there is nothing specifically to attach it to the faith of the Christian religion. In 1830 in the foreword to the third edition of the *Encyclopedia* Hegel argues that when one makes feeling the criterion, the relation of faith becomes a purely formal one. He explains, people with this mistaken conception

busy themselves at great length with a mass of indifferent external matters of the faith; but then in contrast they stand by the name of the Lord Christ in a completely barren fashion as far as the basic import and intellectual content of the faith itself is concerned; and they deliberately and scornfully disdain the elaboration of doctrine that is the foundation of the faith of the Christian church. For the spiritual, fully thoughtful, and scientific expansion [of the doctrine] would upset, and even forbid or wipe out, the self-conceit of their boasting which relies on the spiritless and fruitless assurance . . . that they are in possession of Christianity, and have it exclusively for their own.¹⁶

It is clear that if religion is to make any sense, it must contain a concrete content that is accessible to everyone. It cannot be the private, exclusive domain of specific individuals to the exclusion of others.

Hegel is interested in making a case not just for religion in general but for Christianity in particular. For Christianity to be a specific religion, he reasons, it must have a determinate content. This content is determined by its conception of

¹⁶ Hegel, *EL*, p. 20; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 27.

God and its dogmas, which are objectively accessible. If it lacks this content, then an ostensible belief in Christianity could in effect be a belief in anything at all. Hegel explains this while criticizing what he takes to be a mistaken 'philosophizing' view of his own age that he associates with Jacobi and some of the German Romantics:

The Christian faith implies an authority that belongs to the church, while, on the contrary, the faith of this philosophizing standpoint is just the authority of one's own subjective revelation. Moreover, the Christian faith is an objective content that is inwardly rich, a system of doctrine and cognition; whereas the content of this [philosophical] faith is inwardly so indeterminate that it may perhaps admit that content too—but equally it may embrace within it the belief that the Dalai-Lama, the bull, the ape, etc., is God, or it may, for its own part, restrict itself to God in general, to the "highest essence."¹⁷

With these examples it is clear that content is not an indifferent part of a religion. The content is precisely what defines the individual religions and separates and distinguishes them from one another. Simply by saying that one believes is not enough to determine one's confession. But this content is precisely the proof that belief is a matter of knowledge. One must *know* the content of one's belief in order to distinguish it from other beliefs.

The lack of content leads to another problem. As we saw above in connection with Hegel's criticism of Schleiermacher,¹⁸ if God cannot be known and there is no concrete content given from the outside, then it is only natural that this will get filled in from the inside, namely, by some subjective notion that is idiosyncratic to the individual. But allowing people to assign whatever content they see fit is dangerous. Hegel explains:

While the divine being is thus placed beyond our knowledge, and outside the limit of all human things, we have the convenient license of wandering as far as we list, in the direction of our fancies. We are freed from the obligation to refer our knowledge to the divine and true. On the other hand, the vanity and egotism which characterize it, find, in this false position, ample justification; and the pious modesty, which puts far from it the knowledge of God, can well estimate how much furtherance thereby accrues to its own wayward and vain strivings.¹⁹

With no concrete content to determine or restrain action, the door is open for religious fanaticism to believe the most far-fetched things and even to carry out

¹⁷ Hegel, *EL*, § 63; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 168.

¹⁸ Chapter 3, Section 3.5 above.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 14; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 41.

extreme acts in the name of religion.²⁰ It is important that there be some objective content that is generally recognized. Only in this way is it possible to hold back the forces of fanaticism.

Hegel's account of the determinate religions has long puzzled scholars since it is not immediately clear why he believes that he needs to give a detailed analysis of the world's religions, many of which are little known to most philosophers. The answer lies in the issue of content. Since Hegel insists that content is an essential part of religion for all the reasons just discussed, it is important for him to examine the specific content in the different world religions in order to demonstrate that there is a historical development taking place. Only when one can discern accurately the content of the different forms of religious belief is it possible to see how the human mind, reflected in them, is slowly progressing towards human freedom. Each of the world religions is unique and has its own special set of beliefs and practices, that is, its content. Thus in his analyses Hegel attempts to characterize each of the religions in terms of some prominent, distinguishing feature unique to them. One can see Hegel's negative response to the lack of religious content in the views of the religious movements of his time as an important motivating factor for the development of the analysis of the determinate religions. This is Hegel's way of demonstrating beyond any doubt that all religions have a determinate content and that it is absolutely essential to understand this if one is to grasp the nature of religion generally or the truth of Christianity specifically.

4.4 The Relation of Philosophy to Religion: Concepts and Picture-thinking

With the Romantics' split between thought and feeling, it is often thought that there is an unbridgeable gap between philosophy and religion. Specifically, it is thought that philosophy has nothing to do with religion since it is confined to the sphere of rationality, whereas religion is concerned with inwardness, subjectivity, and feeling. But Hegel conceives of the relation between philosophy and religion differently.²¹ While he grants that feeling does, of course, play a role in religion, there is a rational element that can be grasped by philosophical cognition. This means that philosophy and religion are not to be conceived as radically separate

²⁰ In the *Philosophy of Right* Hegel defines evil as the disregard for the objective and the universal and giving priority to the arbitrariness of one's own particularity. See *PR*, § 139; *Jub.*, vol. 7, pp. 200–4.

²¹ For a detailed account of the relation between philosophy and religion, see *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 115–21; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 33–8. *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 151–4; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 62–5. *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 1, pp. 60–92; *Jub.*, vol. 17, pp. 92–125. See Stephen Rocker, *Hegel's Rational Religion: The Validity of Hegel's Argument for the Identity in Content of Absolute Religion and Absolute Philosophy*, Madison and Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, London: Associated University Presses 1995. Quentin Lauer, 'Hegel on the Identity of Content in Religion and Philosophy,' in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Darrel E. Christensen, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1970, pp. 261–78.

undertakings; indeed, philosophy and religion have some important things in common.

Hegel is well known for his claim that religion and philosophy share in some significant sense the same subject matter. Indeed, at the beginning of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he explains: 'it must be said that the content of philosophy, its need and interest, is wholly in common with that of religion. The object of religion, like that of philosophy, is the eternal truth, God and nothing but God and the explication of God.'²² Similarly, at the very beginning of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, he writes, philosophy 'does, initially, have its objects in common with religion. Both of them have the *truth* in the highest sense of the word as their object, for both hold that *God* and *God alone* is the truth. Both of them also go on to deal with the realm of the finite, with *nature* and the *human spirit*, and with their relation to each other and to God as to their truth.'²³ Also in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he expresses this even more radically by speaking of philosophy and religion as a unity: 'Thus religion and philosophy coincide in one. In fact philosophy is itself the service of God, as is religion. But each of them, religion as well as philosophy, is the service of God in a way peculiar to it.'²⁴

Philosophy and religion both try to understand the absolute truth about the infinite. Neither philosophy nor religion would be satisfied with claiming that their truth was not ultimate or final. Although philosophy does not use religious language to express this, it is nonetheless concerned with attaining an absolute truth just as is religion. But there can only be one absolute truth about the infinite. It does not make sense to talk about two different kinds of truth, one in philosophy and one in religion. Hegel consistently claims that religion is a form of knowing and to this extent is continuous with philosophy. Similarly, he is critical of all attempts to separate religion from philosophy and isolate it in a sphere unto itself.

But while philosophy and religion share the same content, they are nonetheless different in the way in which they approach and understand this content.²⁵

²² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 152; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 63.

²³ Hegel, *EL*, § 1; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 41. *PhS*, p. 479; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 602: 'Spirit itself as a whole, and the self-differentiated moments within it, fall within the sphere of picture-thinking and in the form of objectivity. The *content* of this picture-thinking is Absolute Spirit.' *PR*, § 270; *Jub.*, vol. 7, p. 349: 'The content of religion is absolute truth, and it is associated with a disposition of the most exalted kind.' *EL*, § 45, Addition; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 135–6: 'absolute idealism can hardly be regarded as the private property of philosophy in actual fact, because, on the contrary, it forms the basis of all religious consciousness. This is because religion, too, regards the sum total of everything that is there, in short, the world before us, as created and governed by God.' See *PhS*, p. 488; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 614: 'The content of religion proclaims earlier in time than does Science, what *Spirit* is, but only Science is its true knowledge of itself.' *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 1, p. 79; *Jub.*, vol. 17, p. 111: 'Thus religion has a content in common with philosophy, the forms alone being different; and the only essential point is that the form of the Notion should be so far perfected as to be able to grasp the content of religion.'

²⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 153; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 64–5. See also *Phil. of Mind*, § 573; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 458–74.

²⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 153; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 64–5.

Religion is a part of the common cultural heritage that is found in all peoples; it is something that is learned from earliest childhood and constitutes a part of the background of one's cultural identity. Religion belongs to the most intimate and immediate sphere of one's familial and social relations. It is thus something that a large number of people have, and there is no requirement that one be particularly educated or learned. By contrast, philosophy is a specialized field that requires years of training and reading to master. The philosopher's approach to his or her subject matter is never something immediate but rather always reflective and carefully considered. While philosophy is also a part of the cultural heritage of a people, it is not usually something that one is indoctrinated into from earliest childhood in the same way as religion.

Thus the respective approaches to religion of the ordinary believer and the trained philosopher will obviously be very different. With regard to the approach and methodology of the former, Hegel believes that *Vorstellung*, often rendered in English as 'picture-thinking', is the cognitive faculty at work. By this he means that the common believer's access to the practices and doctrines of his or her tradition is not via abstract concepts or ideas but rather religious stories and images. By this Hegel has in mind the narratives, stories, or poems about the divine that are found in the different religions, such as the accounts in Homer, Hesiod, the Hebrew Bible, or the *Ramayana*. But one can also think, for example, of some of the famous Renaissance paintings depicting God as an anthropomorphic figure or of the Greek sculptures or friezes depicting Zeus or Apollo.

By contrast, philosophy understands religion in a quite different way. Philosophical thinking operates with concepts.²⁶ The philosopher is able to penetrate the outward appearances of things and uncover the deeper, enduring truth behind them. In any field of human experience, such as the natural sciences, the social sciences, the arts, etc., the untrained eye is unable to see everything that is going on. It is unable to grasp the true inner workings of the phenomena in these fields. But the trained eye knows what to look for and can separate the irrelevant aspects of the object sphere from the relevant and meaningful ones. Philosophers learn how to think in terms of abstract concepts and to recognize them in the different spheres of human existence. So also with regard to religion, the philosopher is not seduced or mesmerized by religious stories or myths but instead penetrates to their deeper inner meaning. This constitutes, for Hegel, the universal and necessary aspect of religion in contrast to the contingent and inessential parts. For this reason the God of the philosophers seems to be a very different kind of God from that of the common religious believer.

²⁶ For Hegel's account of the difference between these cognitive faculties, see *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 404–6; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 299–301. Hegel's distinction between picture-thinking and conceptual knowing is a broad topic. See, for example, Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005, pp. 111–15.

Therefore, for Hegel, religion and philosophy have a different methodology and thus a different approach, but he hastens to add that this does not mean that they are dealing with two separate things or have two separate truths. On the contrary, their subject matter is the same, and both religion and philosophy express the truth, each in its own way. Here one can see an analogy with the sciences. We use everyday language to talk about things in the world, but a scientist uses much more precise, technical words to describe the same thing. The understanding of the layman and the scientist is simply different. We say with our common sense that the fire is warm, but the scientist with a pedantic disposition will correct us and say that the chemical reactions are causing the atoms in our blood to move faster and as a result we have the sensation of warmth. These are two different ways of talking about and understanding the same thing. For the scientist, the latter is the more precise and accurate account. This is something that the layman can be wholly ignorant of and indifferent about. Hegel's point is that in both cases the truth is captured and the religious believer and the philosopher grasp it to the best of their ability. In this way there is a continuity between philosophy and religion.

4.5 The Goal of Seeing the Rational in Religion

Hegel criticizes the Enlightenment for its condemnation of religion as superstition since this merely shows that the Enlightenment thinkers are unable to see the deeper philosophical truth that religion contains. By being fixated on the world of sense, the Enlightenment has failed to grasp the rationality or *logos* at work in this sphere and has thus judged religion negatively on a mistaken basis. According to the Enlightenment view, religion is irrational and therefore wrong since it cannot be grounded in or justified by the sciences.

This is not so far away from the modern secular view of the present day. From this perspective, the traditions, beliefs, and rituals of the different world religions appear to be wholly arbitrary, irrational, and unmotivated. When reading about the religious stories of ancient cultures, one is astonished to learn what far-fetched things some peoples once believed. The field of religion seems to defy any rational understanding or explanation. But this is just what Hegel wants to contest. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* he explains that in the different religions we find ideas which strike us as absurd: 'It is easy to say that such a religion is just senseless and irrational. What is not easy is to recognize the necessity and truth of such religious forms, their connection with reason, and seeing that is a more difficult task than declaring something to be senseless.'²⁷ Religion constitutes one

²⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 570; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 467.

aspect of spirit, and spirit is the work of the human mind. Therefore, it must contain the rationality of the human mind, even though this may be deeply hidden or difficult to discern. Human reason is reflected in one way or another in all of its products.

The charge is often levelled against Hegel that he is Eurocentric, ethnocentric, and racist in his treatments of history and religion in his famous lectures. In some ways it seems hard to avoid this conclusion given his encomium for Christianity and the development of Western culture. In this context it is sometimes claimed that Hegel ridicules as irrational those elements of other religions that do not fit conveniently into his system. But, on the contrary, Hegel, in fact, tries to defend the non-European religions against the prejudices of the day. He says that they should not be dismissed as superstitious nonsense. Instead, they contain truth, as does Christianity. The other religions also contain the rationality of the human mind, only in forms in which we are unaccustomed to seeing it. In this context, Hegel oddly looks more progressive than many of his Enlightenment predecessors, who rejected all forms of religion as benighted superstition.

Hegel tries to make a case for the importance of studying other religions, even though they may seem foreign and strange to us. Although these other religions are not the final, true culmination of the development of religious consciousness, it does not follow from this that they are worthless and meaningless. On the contrary, each of them plays a role in the development of the concept of the divine through time. Thus each of them has a unique and valid contribution to make. Even the mythologies and sacred stories of other religions that, at first glance, appear to be absurd, have their own inward reason. The challenge is to find and understand it. Hegel interprets old myths and stories from the ancient sacred writings of the world's religions and gives them a philosophical meaning.

For Hegel, the true philosophical mind does not dismiss and ridicule other religions simply because they contain ideas or forms of worship that strike one as strange. The Enlightenment was quick to criticize all forms of traditional religion as superstition and to hail Deism as the only rational form of religion. This disposition reveals, for Hegel, a failure to appreciate the rational nature of religion that a true philosopher can discern. Hegel states quite clearly that when philosophy turns its glance to the field of religion the goal is 'to show forth the rational content of religion'.²⁸ Similarly, he claims: 'We must, therefore, comprehend religion, just like philosophy, which means to know and apprehend it in reason; for it is the work of self-revealing reason and is the highest form of reason.'²⁹ Religion has a rational content that unfolds historically through time as the world religions develop.

²⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 247; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 175.

²⁹ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 1, p. 62; *Jub.*, vol. 17, pp. 93–4.

4.6 The Determination of Objectivity: The Internal Criterion

Hegel objects to Deism's conclusion that God is a transcendent entity beyond the reach of human perception and knowing. He believes that such conceptions of the divine are simply abstractions. He rejects all attempts to posit any kind of transcendent object or entity beyond what the human mind has access to. His approach here can be fruitfully understood by means of a quick glance at the internal criterion for truth that he proposes in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

According to Kant's epistemology, the human perceptive and cognitive apparatus, consisting of the forms of sensible intuition—space and time—and the categories of the understanding, work together to produce determinate representations of objects that we encounter. In this way the inchoate information that we receive from the world is rendered into the coherent reality that we experience. But Kant repeatedly denies that we can have any knowledge of what these objects are in themselves, that is, apart from our representations of them. Since we can never, as it were, escape our own necessary ways of perceiving and shaping the world, it is impossible to know how the objects truly are on their own, independent of the mediation of our cognitive apparatus. There thus arises in Kant the famous distinction between representations and things-in-themselves that has been the source of such controversy in the reception of his philosophy.

Hegel believes that the model of cognition and perception that Kant presents is confused, and he is particularly keen to attack the notion of a thing-in-itself. In the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* he argues:

The thing-in-itself...expresses the object when we leave out of sight all that consciousness makes of it, all its emotional aspects, and all specific thoughts of it. It is easy to see what is left—utter abstraction, total emptiness, only described still as an “other-world”—the negative of every image, feeling, and definite thought. Nor does it require much penetration to see that this *caput mortuum* is still only a product of thought, such as accrues when thought is carried on to abstraction unalloyed.³⁰

While Kant claims that nothing can be known about the thing-in-itself, Hegel points out that this very notion is itself the product of thought. It is, namely, the opposite term or the negative other of a representation. It is what we imagine an object to be when we *per impossible* subtract from the determinations of our cognitive apparatus.

³⁰ Hegel, *EL*, § 44; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 133.

In his methodological considerations in the *Phenomenology*, Hegel rethinks the picture presented by Kant in order to develop a more satisfactory conception. Kant's view is one that designates '*knowledge* as the concept, but the essence or the *true* as what exists, or the *object*', in which case 'the examination consists in seeing whether the concept corresponds to the object.'³¹ Although Kant is adamant that no such comparison is possible since we cannot know how the thing is in itself and thus cannot compare it to our representations, this is the inevitable question that arises from his model since one naturally wants to know if one's representations are a veridical reflection of the objects in the world around us. Since no such comparison is possible on Kant's view, it has often been claimed that his epistemology ends in skepticism.

The key to understanding this issue is Hegel's key term 'the concept' often translated as 'the notion' (*Begriff*). In this context it simply means one's general conception of what a thing is. The human mind always implicitly makes use of such conceptions and compares them with the world it perceives around it. We have a conception of what truth is, and we compare this with the numerous statements we hear every day which claim to be true. We have a conception of beauty which we compare to the numerous objects that we find, for example, in an art museum. In these cases we are constantly going back and forth between our conception and our empirical experience, comparing and contrasting the two. When they fail to match up, then we must reject the specific statement as true or the specific work of art as beautiful. Human beings make these kinds of assessments every day in every sphere of life.

The problem with the Kantian view is that it wants to claim that the concept, that is, the thing-in-itself or the criterion for truth, is transcendent and thus inaccessible to us. But Hegel points out that this is an absurdity since this is simply one feature of the human cognitive apparatus itself, indeed, one that is constantly being used. Hegel proposes to recast the Kantian picture such that it is clear that both elements are in fact objects for consciousness. He explains: 'But if we call the *essence* or the in-itself of the *object* the *concept*, and on the other hand understand by the *object* the Notion itself as *object*, viz. as it exists *for an other*, then the examination consists in seeing whether the object corresponds to its concept.'³² The comparison is between our conception or abstract thoughts (truth, beauty, honesty, etc.) and the concrete objects as we meet them in the world of perception. These things are not separate from us but are both objects of consciousness. Objects can be understood from two different perspectives, as they exist on their own and as they exist 'for an other'. While the former does not provide us with any meaningful information, the latter is always taken up and brought into the context of the human cognitive capacity, where it can be

³¹ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 53; *Jub.* vol. 2, p. 76.

³² Hegel, *PhS*, p. 53; *Jub.* vol. 2, p. 76.

evaluated. It is precisely by means of these comparisons that we can make progress in our knowing, instead of simply declaring that something cannot be known and coming to a halt.

Hegel's picture, despite the complex language in which it is couched, is in fact quite intuitive and comprehensible simply because he portrays an action of the human mind that we are all familiar with since we are always comparing our perceptions with our concepts and then making and revising our evaluations based on this. In the context of the *Phenomenology* the upshot is that this represents an internal criterion for truth since both elements that are being compared are objects of consciousness. In short, there is no transcendent element that stands outside or beyond consciousness. Hegel writes: 'the essential point to bear in mind throughout the whole investigation is that these two moments, "concept" and "object," "being-for-another" and "being-in-itself," both fall *within* that knowledge which we are investigating.'³³ There is no outside of consciousness.

This methodology that Hegel sketches in the *Phenomenology* is also relevant for his investigation of religion.³⁴ When we examine the different religions of the world, we immediately notice that they all have their own gods and goddesses which look very different. These different concepts change and develop over time as one religion arises, develops, and then falls away. Hegel conceives of the different world religions as a single developing religion with a single developing concept of the divine. His insight is that the objects of religion are in a sense governed by certain general epistemological principles. God can be conceived as *for itself* and *for another*, but in any case God is *for consciousness*. Given this, the divine is a thought or conception that derives from human thinking. It would be absurd to imagine the divine as something that has a special status or that is somehow not for consciousness. This is a fundamental premise in Hegel's basic idealist program.

The idea of the divine is just that, an idea. As idea, it is no different from the idea of truth or beauty or anything else. Thus the job of philosophy is to explore this idea. It is in this sense that one can talk about the different world religions as all being a part of one single developing conception of the divine, although this might seem at first glance quite counterintuitive. All of the different religions operate with an idea of the divine. Thus this idea can be analysed as dynamically developing, with the individual world religions as its specific stages.

In the stories and mythologies of the different peoples there is ample information about the way in which they perceived and conceived of their divinities. This is the material that needs to be studied if we are to be able to make a comparison between the general conception of the divine and the concrete experience of it.

³³ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 53; *Jub*, vol. 2, p. 76.

³⁴ See Jon Stewart, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion as a Phenomenology,' *Filozofia*, vol. 75, no. 5, 2020, pp. 386–400.

This means that God is an object of consciousness and can be compared and examined with other such objects. God is not some abstract other in the beyond. The notion of revelation is key here since in revelation God shows himself. One can compare these revelations to the concept to see if they match up. This account of Hegel's methodology makes clear why he feels that it is absolutely imperative to give a detailed account of the different world religions. We need to explore the different conceptions of the divine that appear in history. Moreover, we need to see the appearances of God and compare them. These are all objects for consciousness and thus supply useful information for a philosophical analysis of the object sphere of religion.

4.7 Faith and Knowledge

Hegel's understanding of the relation of faith to knowledge is closely bound up with the larger story that he wants to tell about the development of freedom through the ages. He begins this account with ancient pagan religions. According to his interpretation, ancient peoples were characterized by their immediate relation to their culture and in this case their religion. Thus, they did not think to question the religious beliefs handed down by their ancestors. His model for this is often that of ancient Greece. The Greeks lived in a harmonious relation with their long established cultural heritage. Hegel's favourite example of this is Sophocles' tragedy, *Antigone*, where the claim is made that the laws of the gods 'are not of yesterday or today, but everlasting, | Though where they came from, none of us can tell.'³⁵ The truth was thought to exist in the outward public sphere as a simple matter of fact, and no subjective element was allowed. In this context there was no difference between faith and knowledge; indeed, it is not even clear that one can speak of faith since not believing was not really an option.

According to Hegel's account, this situation changed with the introduction of the principle of subjective freedom, that is, the idea that there is a necessary subjective element in the truth relation. This principle was introduced into ancient Greece by Socrates, who refused to acknowledge the truths of traditional Athenian society without a careful rational analysis of them. Only if they could survive his critical inspection could they be accepted. Now for the first time a subjective dimension appeared, whereby the consent of the person played a role in claims to truth. A fact was not true in itself but rather because a person had found it true and consented to it.

This Socratic principle of subjectivity or inwardness was brought further in the development of Christianity. Now there was a split between faith and reason that

³⁵ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 261; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 333. See also *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 38; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 70.

did not previously exist in traditional cultures due to their immediacy. Now there was reflection, and with reflection comes doubt and the possibility of rejecting specific truth claims. Here Christianity differs from previous religions:

The expression "faith" is reserved to the Christian religion; we do not speak of a Greek or Egyptian faith, or of faith in Zeus or Apis. Faith expresses the inwardness of certainty, indeed certainty of the deepest and most concentrated kind as distinguished from all other forms of opinion, representation, conviction, and volition. This inwardness, as at once what is deepest and most abstract, comprises thought itself. A contradiction of this faith by thought is therefore the most painful of all divisions in the depths of spirit.³⁶

Christianity paves the way for the modern principle of subjectivity by virtue of its conception of inwardness and freedom. In Christianity individuals realize that they participate in the truth. Christianity recognizes and develops further the subjective element introduced by Socrates.³⁷

In the Middle Ages, this radical split between faith and reason slowly dissolved. There arose a fundamental belief in the harmony of the two. One studied the sciences and theology in order to have knowledge about one's faith: 'During the whole of the *Middle Ages*, theology was understood to mean nothing other than a *scientific* knowledge of Christian truths, that is, a knowledge essentially connected with philosophy.'³⁸ In the modern world, however, this split arises again. With the philosophy of the Enlightenment it is claimed that we cannot know the truth or God. Thus faith is divorced from any form of knowledge. In Romanticism faith then became conceived as a form of immediate knowledge or feeling in contrast to scientific knowledge, which is deemed impotent. For this reason Hegel frequently criticizes the then current situation of religion along the same lines as he criticizes what he regards as contemporary relativism and nihilism. The goal of Hegel's lectures is to correct these misunderstandings and restore the traditional doctrines of Christianity. He believes that the only way to do this is with an analysis of the religions of the world.

³⁶ Hegel, *LPE*, p. 39; *VBG*, p. 230.

³⁷ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 3; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 100: 'the individual himself is laid claim to, is made worthy of attaining on his own account this unity, which is to make himself worthy of the Spirit of God—Grace, as it is called—dwelling in him.' *LHP*, vol. 3, p. 18; *VGP*, vol. 3, p. 2.

³⁸ Hegel, *LPE*, p. 39; *VBG*, p. 230.

Forerunners of the Christian Conception of the Divine: Judaism and Greco-Roman Polytheism

In his account of the world religions, Hegel first treats the religions of nature, which conceive of the divine as an object of nature. Under this rubric he analyses, for example, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the Egyptian polytheism. Then he turns to the religions of spirit, which have a conception of the divine as a self-conscious entity. Here he treats Judaism and the colourful polytheistic religions of Greece and Rome. Since the religions of spirit are the closest to Christianity, Hegel is keen to show, first, how they are superior to the religions of nature, and, second, how they still fall short of the absolute religion. The key lies in their content, specifically, in their conceptions of the divine. This might seem surprising since Christianity arose historically from Judaism and in a sense shares the same God with it. Likewise, the Greeks conceived of some of their gods as human beings who were deified and thus had both a human and a divine element, like Christ. Hegel wants to demonstrate that these ideas were important steps along the way to the development of the concept of the God of Christianity, but there are still important imperfections in them which the Christian conception overcame.

5.1 Judaism: God as Creator

During Hegel's time the scholarly study of the Jewish religion took place in two different departments.¹ On the one hand, it was still by and large regarded as a part of the study of theology, specifically biblical studies and exegesis. On the other hand, Hebrew was also studied in departments of oriental and Semitic languages, but scholars in this field focused more on the language and less on the religious

¹ For an overview of the development of these fields, see Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Chicago: Moody Press 1975, pp. 73–82. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to The Old Testament*, London: Tyndale Press 1970, pp. 3–18. John Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1985. Stefan Heidemann, 'Der Paradigmenwechsel in der Jenaer Orientalistik in der Zeit der literarischen Klassik,' in *Der Deutschen Morgenland. Bilder des Orients in der deutschen Literatur und Kultur von 1770 bis 1850*, ed. by Charis Goer and Michael Hofmann, Munich: Wilhelm Fink 2008, pp. 243–57.

elements of the text. In contrast to the theologians, these researchers did not always feel the obligation to regard the Hebrew Bible as a text revealed by God, and this made it possible for them to study it in a more secular light. They attempted to understand the biblical texts based on the rules of grammar and linguistics and not on the dictates of dogma. Only gradually did the field of Judaic studies as we know it today come to emancipate itself from both theology and linguistics, and this was a process that was only beginning to take place during Hegel's lifetime.

Although he knew the Bible very well, Hegel was not primarily interested in Biblical studies or philology. His main concern was with the concept of God as presented in the Jewish religion. One important element in this concept is the Jewish conception of the divine as the creator of the universe. If there are several gods, then the power of the universe is distributed among them, with each of them having his own special powers and areas of influence. But if there is only one God, then He is responsible not just for some specific area but rather for the entire universe. His power is not localized to a specific sphere but rather is infinite.² Moreover, the limited power of the gods in polytheism generally prevented the ancients from understanding them as responsible for the creation of the universe. While Zeus is very powerful, Hesiod does not say that he created the world. Hegel begins his analysis of Judaism with an account of the different stages or 'determinations' involved in the creation.

At the first stage God is alone prior to the creation. There is no universe and no other thing or person. There is no other by means of which God can be determined. According to Hegel's theory of determination, a thing is what it is in relation to other things. But when God only exists on His own, then there is no relation and hence no determination.³ If God were the only thing in the universe, then He would be indeterminate. If there were only a single colour in the universe, for example, green, then there would be no colour since one colour necessarily demands the existence of others in order to exist by contrast. Green only makes sense when one also knows what yellow, red, etc. are. If absolutely everything were green, there would be no green and no colour. So if there were only one thing or entity, it would also be impossible to think it since this thinking always requires other things to contrast it with. The one entity is what it is in contrast to other things. With the creation of the universe there is now a contrastive term to the divine: God and the universe. God is then able to be distinguished from something else, from some other. This is, according to Hegel, a necessary development in the actualization of the divine. The notion of God as an absolute power which rests

² Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 195; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 260–1: 'God is known as the creator of all men, as he is of all nature, and as absolute causality generally. But this great principle, as further conditioned, is exclusive unity.'

³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 673; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 565.

inert but never realizes itself is contradictory. A power is only a power if it is exercised or expressed. Likewise, God is only God if he is a discrete, determinate being in contrast to other things.

God must thus separate himself or distinguish something from himself in order to become a determinate being vis-à-vis something else. This original act of separation is the creation: God exists and creates the universe out of nothing.⁴ According to Hegel's speculative methodology, there is always a movement from an initial unity or immediacy to a separation. He believes that this is demanded by speculative logic. It lies in the nature of the Notion or spirit to develop; it cannot remain static. No thing can be determined on its own, but rather determination only comes with distinction and difference. The Jewish conception of the divine must externalize itself in order to distinguish itself from something else and thus set this development into motion. The very first form of distinction is the act of creation.

Hegel tries to capture this with a word play on the German noun *Urteil* (or with Hegel's old orthography *Urtheil*), meaning judgement. Hegel suggests that the etymology of this word is that of the original division or separation (Ur + Teil). In the Book of Genesis creation is the original separation that preceded all other divisions and distinctions, for example, between light and darkness, heaven and earth, water and dry land, etc. The very first division is between God and the universe. In Hegel's speculative logic, the first term is thought of as a universal, and the second as a particular, which implies separation and determination. He often explains this by analogy with a syllogism. The major premise of a syllogism, 'All humans are mortal', makes a universal claim about all human beings. The minor premise, 'Socrates is a human', makes a statement about a particular individual. Hegel refers to the minor premise as a judgement. The word play thus refers to a judgement as a proposition involving a particular in this way and a separation or distinction: a specific individual 'Socrates' is distinguished from 'all humans'. With the first or original separation there are then two original things: God and the universe. God can then begin to be determined by contrast to the universe, that is, God is what is not the universe.

This then leads to the second stage, where God is conceived hypothetically as a subject. The distinction or differentiation involved in the creation is important for the determination of God. Now there are in effect two things, God and the universe, and these two can be distinguished from one another. God stands opposed to the universe as His sole contrastive term. But this is not sufficient to determine God as a fully self-conscious entity. The structure of self-consciousness

⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 426–7; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 326. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 672; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 564. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 739; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 625–6. See also *PhS*, p. 467; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 587: 'Thus the merely eternal or abstract Spirit becomes an "other" to itself, or enters into existence, and directly into *immediate* existence. Accordingly, it *creates* a world.'

requires a movement of recognition with other self-conscious subjects. One needs another self-consciousness by means of which one can see oneself from the outside. But at the initial stage God is the only subject and is juxtaposed to the universe and not to another self-conscious subject. Thus, according to Hegel, God at this stage is only a 'presupposed' subject.⁵ When God is related to the universe he is merely conscious but not yet self-conscious.⁶

God's full development as subject is only possible when He enters into a relation with the Jewish people. Only with their recognition does He become fully developed subjectivity. Just as there was a necessity for the creation of the universe to determine God at all, so also there is therefore a necessity for the creation of human beings in order to determine God as a self-conscious agent. Only with the recognition of human beings as self-conscious subjects can God be developed as self-conscious.

This leads to the third stage which focuses on God's goodness and justice. At this stage where God is merely juxtaposed to the world and there are not yet human beings, He is determined solely by His wisdom, which is expressed in His attributes: goodness and justice (or righteousness).⁷ Hegel defines the former as follows: 'the being of finite things must be characterized as [a work of] *goodness*.'⁸ Thus 'the good' is associated with creation. In Genesis, after God creates the individual things, light, the dry land, and the seas, etc., it is written 'and God saw that it was good.'⁹ The creation is a positive act. In this way God realizes Himself. This implies that everything owes its existence to God. Whatever is apart from or outside God has no right to exist. Hegel might well have been inspired by Herder, who also discusses this point.¹⁰

Righteousness or justice is the negative counterpart to goodness; it represents the mutability and destruction of finite things. This is demonstration that only God is absolute. All created things are dependent on him. They are finite and fleeting and will in time decay and pass away: 'Justice in turn is the manifestation of the nullity or ideality of this finite [being], it is the fact that this [finite] being is

⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 426; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 326.

⁶ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 467; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 587–8: 'for since Spirit is essentially the simple Self, this Self is equally present in the world: it is the *existent* Spirit, which is the individual Self which has consciousness and distinguishes itself as "other," or as world from itself. This individual Self as at first thus immediately posited, is not yet Spirit *for itself*; it does not *exist as Spirit*.'

⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 673; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 566–7.

⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 429; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 328. See also *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 674; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 566.

⁹ Genesis 1:4, 1:10, 1:12, 1:18, 1:21, 1:25, 1:31.

¹⁰ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie. Eine Anleitung für die Liebhaber derselben und der ältesten Geschichte des menschlichen Geistes*, vols 1–2, Leipzig: Johann Philipp Haugs Wittwe 1787, vol. 1, p. 68. English translation: *The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, vols 1–2, trans. by James Marsh, Burlington: Edward Smith 1833, vol. 1, pp. 67–8: 'When the first morning beam shot forth, thou, the creator, didst declare the light to be good, and didst consecrate it to be an eternal emblem of thy presence, and of thy divine glory, of all delight and purity, of all wisdom, goodness, and blessedness. God dwells in light, and his countenance beams with paternal goodness, and paternal joy. He enlightened the hearts of all good men, and illuminates their path.'

not genuine independence—this manifestation [of God] as power is what endows finite things with their right.’¹¹ In the Hebrew Bible the word ‘righteous’ is often used of God when he destroys people as punishment. This destruction is easily done since the entire created world is transitory.

The nature of these attributes also clearly signals the shift from nature to spirit. Righteousness and goodness are moral predicates that are value judgements made by self-conscious individuals. These are not predicates that one would ascribe to objects of nature. The actions that are being described with them—creation and destruction—can be regarded as natural phenomena, but in the context of the Hebrew Bible they take on a moral dimension, that is, they are more than nature. According to Hegel’s dialectical view, goodness is the positive concept, while justice is the opposite negative concept. Creation is good and positive, while destruction is negative. But this movement is undialectical since these two elements are not mediated by a third:

The negative moment is justice, to the end that the nullity of existent things may be made manifest, as we have seen in the coming into being and passing away of Shiva; it is only the aspect of process as such, of the contingent, whose nullity is manifested. So this negativity is not the infinite return-to-self that would characterize spirit; it is just the negativity of justice.¹²

What is lacking here is the third stage: the negation of the negation. By associating the God of Judaism with Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction, Hegel is suggesting that at this point the full development to spirit has not yet been achieved. Here he subtly hints at the resolution of the problem in Christianity.

But the Jewish conception is nonetheless higher than the unresolved repetition of Shiva or of the dualism of Ormuzd (good) and Ahriman (evil) in Zoroastrianism. In Judaism the attribute of righteousness is a recognition of the insignificance and impotence of nature and the absolute power of God as spirit. In short, spirit has conquered and rules supreme over nature:

The Spiritual speaks itself here absolutely free of the sensuous, and nature is reduced to something merely external and undivine. This is the true and proper estimate of nature at this stage; for only at a more advanced phase can the Idea attain a reconciliation in this its alien form. Its first utterances will be in opposition to nature; for Spirit, which has been hitherto dishonored, now first attains its due dignity, while nature resumes its proper position. Nature is conceived as having the ground of its existence in another—as something posited, created; and this idea, that God is the lord and creator of nature, leads

¹¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 675; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 567.

¹² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 429–30; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 329.

men to regard God as the Exalted One, while the whole of nature is only his robe of glory, and is expended in his service.¹³

The idea of God as creator of all of nature makes Him the absolute master of it. Without God, nature is nothing. This marks an important shift from the previous religions, where nature had the upper hand. This recalls, for example, Hegel's analysis of the Chinese religion,¹⁴ which was characterized by an exaggerated superstition issuing from a profound sense of dependence on nature. In the world of the ancient Chinese it was nature that was the absolutely dominating force over spirit. Here in Judaism, the situation is exactly reversed.

The shortcoming of the Judaic conception of God, according to Hegel, is that it remains overly abstract. God in the transcendent sphere, beyond the mundane, is indeterminate and unsatisfying. While God is conceived as self-conscious in Judaism, this is not fully developed as a concrete determinate being. In metaphysical terms, this conception of the divine is the universal without the particular. According to Hegel, this leads to a form of religious alienation, whereby God is forever distant and inaccessible to the religious believer. What is required is a concrete conception of the divine that overcomes the separation and offers a reconciliation. Thus, despite the fact that the God of Judaism is conceived as a self-conscious entity, there is still something missing that only comes with the Christian conception.

It should also be noted that Hegel exercised an influence on the development of Old Testament studies primarily by means of his students, who applied his methodology to more specialized investigations.¹⁵ One of the most important examples of this is Wilhelm Vatke's (1806–82) *Die biblische Theologie wissenschaftlich dargestellt* from 1835.¹⁶ While Hegel presents Judaism as a more or less fixed, static, monolithic entity, Vatke is interested in exploring the historical development of the religion. In this work he portrays the development of Judaism in eight separate periods. His analysis is rife with Hegelian categories and structures such as consciousness and self-consciousness, the movement from universal, to particular, to the culmination in their unity, and the movement from immediacy, to mediation and their unity. Another important student of Hegel was Bruno Bauer, who published his two-volume *Kritik der Geschichte der Offenbarung. Die Religion*

¹³ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 196; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 261.

¹⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 299–303; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 203–7. *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 547–62; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 445–58. *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 729–31; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 618–19. *NR*, pp. 105–19.

¹⁵ See Jan Rohls, 'G. W. F. Hegel: The Impact of His Philosophy on Old Testament Studies,' in *Hebrew Bible. Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. III, Part 1, *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Magne Sæbo, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2013, pp. 45–52.

¹⁶ Wilhelm Vatke, *Die biblische Theologie wissenschaftlich dargestellt. Erster Band. Die Religion des Alten Testaments nach den kanonischen Büchern entwickelt*, Berlin: G. Bethge 1835 (no second volume ever appeared). See Rogerson, 'Vatke's Biblical Theology,' in his *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany*, pp. 69–78.

des Alten Testaments in 1838.¹⁷ Bauer took as his point of departure Hegel's understanding of the absolute separation and alienation of the Jews from their God, who is transcendent and stands above nature. This is then overcome in the gradual development of the revelation that culminates in Christianity, realizing the unity of the divine and the human. Thus Hegel's methodology and his treatment of both Judaism and Christianity played an important role in the subsequent development of Biblical studies.

5.2 The Greek Demigods or Heroes

Given Hegel's criticism of the abstract nature of God in Judaism, one might think that he would be attracted to the very concrete conceptions of the deities in Greek polytheism. In particular, the notion of demigods would seem to represent a clear forerunner to the Christian conception of an incarnate deity, both human and divine. The demigods thus reflect yet a further development in the conception of the divine. These figures are usually conceived to have one divine parent and one human parent, and thus are half-divine. Hegel uses the example of the legendary hero Hercules, who was the son of the god Zeus and the mortal Alcmene. According to Hegel's interpretation, Hercules is not immediately a divinity, but rather he must perform a series of difficult tasks and labours to attain the status of the divine. According to the story, Hercules was rendered temporarily insane by the goddess Hera. In this confused state he killed his family. When he regained his sanity and realized what he had done, he attempted to find a way to atone for his actions. The Oracle at Delphi told him that he could do penance by serving King Eurystheus for a period of twelve years. Eurystheus ordered Hercules to undertake ten labours, and later two more were added when the king refused to accept two which Hercules accomplished. The twelve labours of Hercules included killing a lion, destroying the nine-headed Lernean Hydra, and capturing a wild boar alive. In each case one can see how Hercules, the symbol of spirit, kills or subordinates something from nature. He embodies the superiority of spirit over nature.

According to Hegel's view, this is a natural continuation of the shift from the gods of nature to the gods of spirit in the war between the different generations of the divinities, the Olympians and the Titans. The Olympian gods reached their hegemony by the labour of defeating the older gods: 'For the gods of spiritual individuality, though now at rest, have being only through the struggle with the

¹⁷ Bruno Bauer, *Kritik der Geschichte der Offenbarung. Die Religion des Alten Testaments in der geschichtlichen Entwicklung ihrer Principien*, vols 1–2, Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler 1838. John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path Toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980, pp. 298–304. See Douglas Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, pp. 59–60.

Titans.¹⁸ The gods must overcome nature to reach a higher status. They contain the principle of spirit in themselves implicitly until they realize it. But the heroes represent a still higher level since they make this explicit:

This their [sc. the Olympians'] implicit being is posited in the heroes. So the spiritual individuality of the heroes is on a higher level than that of the gods themselves; they are *actually* what the gods are *implicitly*, the activation of this implicit being; and even if they have to labor in order to succeed, in doing so they discard the naturalness that the gods still have in them.¹⁹

There is then a three-step process that begins with the gods of nature, then the Olympians, the gods of spirit, and finally the demigods: 'The gods derive from the power over nature, but the heroes from the gods.'²⁰ While the Olympians still have some trace of the natural element, this has disappeared in the heroes. Hercules represents pure spirit, opposed to the forces of nature.

In Greek mythology a hint of the awareness of this development can be detected in the prophecies that Zeus, the head of the Olympians or the gods of spirit, will one day be overthrown, just as Uranos was overthrown by Cronos and just as Cronos was overthrown by Zeus himself. In each case, the younger generation rebelled against the previous generation, and with each revolution a new step is made away from nature and towards spirit. But the prophecies concerning the downfall of Zeus suggest that the transformation of spirit is not yet complete. They seem to imply that one of the demigods will overthrow him and move the process forward yet again. As evidence of this Hegel refers to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*: 'Aeschylus makes Prometheus say what comforts him in his defiance is the fact that Zeus will have a son who will cast him down off his throne; by this he means Hercules.'²¹ A similar prophecy appears in Aristophanes' play *The Birds*, 'Aristophanes... makes Bacchus say to Hercules, "If Zeus dies, you shall be his heir".'²² Here it is stated directly that the hero Hercules will complete the movement towards spirit by taking over the throne of Zeus.

¹⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 468, note 602; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 367n.

¹⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 468, note 602; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 367n.

²⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 468, note 602; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 367n.

²¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 468; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 368. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 651; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 542. See *Prometheus Bound* in *Aeschylus II*, trans. by Seth G. Benardete and David Grene, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 1956, p. 167, line 768. Prometheus explains the prophecy to Io that Zeus' wife 'shall bear him a son mightier than his father'. Hegel seems to refer to a passage at the end of Prometheus' account of the prophecy when he says that Zeus' marriage in this way 'shall drive him from his power | and from his throne, out of the sight of all' (*Prometheus Bound* in *Aeschylus II*, p. 172, lines 909–10).

²² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 468, note 605; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 368n. See *The Birds* in *The Complete Plays of Aristophanes*, ed. by Moses Hadas, New York: Bantam 1962, p. 283. Poseidon (and not as Hegel says Bacchus) addresses Hercules thus: 'Idiot, don't you know that you've been duped? | You stand in your own light. If Zeus should die | After surrendering his throne to them, | You'll be a pauper—you, his rightful heir, | Who should inherit his entire estate.'

While the Greeks' conception of the divinities as concrete, particular entities is an improvement over the conception of God as the abstract 'One' that is found in Judaism, their view still falls short, according to Hegel. In Christianity, the revelation of God in a concrete human being is an important and essential aspect of the nature of the divine, but there is also a further development that is lacking in the Greek conception, namely, the return of the concrete particular to the universal, the Son to the Father. The Christian conception recognizes the importance of the empirical realm with the doctrine of the Incarnation, but it also conceives of nature as something that must be surpassed. This is represented in the death of Jesus and the idea of the Holy Spirit. Hegel thus sees the Greek religion as making important strides towards the correct concept of the divine, but it has still not yet fully overcome the realm of nature.

5.3 The Oracle and the Interpretation of Nature

The Oracle at Delphi was just one of many forms of divination that played a role in the Greek religion.²³ This institution provides valuable insight into the Greeks' self-understanding. In many ways the Greeks appear very humble with respect to taking responsibility for their outstanding actions. It was common practice for the Greek poets to attribute their works to the gods or muses from whom they received their inspiration: the poems were not their own doing but that of the gods. Similarly although athletes trained diligently, they ascribed their victories to divine assistance. The Greeks thus had a very different sense of their own agency from the one that we have today.

Since the Greeks did not yet have a fully developed sense of subjective freedom, they felt dependent on nature. They inhabited a world of contingency that they did not fully understand.²⁴ They did not know what effects their actions would have in the world or if their undertakings would meet with success. Moreover, since their concept of subjective freedom was undeveloped and the individual was regarded as insignificant, they did not feel that they personally had the right to make important decisions even about their own actions in the world. Weighty matters such as whom to marry were far too important for the individual to decide about.²⁵ Individuals might have certain inklings or intuitions about the matter, or even preferences, but it was the gods alone who could make these decisions or

²³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 486–8; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 387–8. Hegel's main source of information about the oracle seems to be Etienne Clavier, *Mémoire sur les oracles des anciens*, Paris: Libraire Duponcet and Libraire Delaunay 1818 (*Hegel's Library*, 656).

²⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 486; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 386.

²⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 185; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 91: 'it did not fall to individuals themselves to take on their own initiative the *final* decision, make the *final* act of volition—to engage in combat today, to get married or to start out on one's journey today.' See also *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 486–7; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 387. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 668; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 560.

confirm or disconfirm the individual's own view. Socrates claimed that he was going around Athens interrogating people not because he wanted to do so, but because he had been enjoined to do so by the god who had spoken to his friend at the Oracle at Delphi.²⁶ Similarly his inner god, the daimon, was different from his own will and advised him against doing certain things that he might otherwise have been inclined to do.²⁷

Individuals are obliged to act in an uncertain world over which they have little control. It was thus natural that the Greeks wished for some kind of instruction about their hopes and plans and thus sought guidance and confirmation about which action to take from some higher power.²⁸ Decisions had to be made by something outward and not by the inwardness of the individual. The importance of the oracles and the widespread practices of divination were thus closely connected to the Greeks' limited conception of the individual and human agency.

The Greeks sought in nature the confirmation that they believed was required for them to take action and make decisions. A sign of some kind was anticipated. This could take a number of different forms: 'lightning from a clear sky, a bird that starts up against a wide, unbroken horizon'.²⁹ The public oracles institutionalized these practices by localizing them in specific places with specific natural signs. The sounds of nature were considered the voices of the gods. Borrowing from Clavier's *Mémoire sur les oracles des anciens*, Hegel gives the following examples from the well-known public oracles:

In Dodona the future was manifested by three kinds of signs: the movement of the leaves of the sacred oak, the murmuring of the sacred spring, and a noise made by a sacred bronze cask suspended from a willow; when the wind blew, the cask was struck by a switch of bronze thongs held by the bronze figure of a child perched in an adjoining willow. In Delphi too a principal role was played by the wind that issued from a cavern and by the noise the iron tripod made.³⁰

The oracles are examples of nature's mysterious meaning becoming known. Hegel explains that the origin of the oracles was in fact a natural phenomenon, which then was given a meaning by human interpretation:

The oldest oracle was at Dodona... The rustling of the leaves of the sacred oaks was the form of prognostication there. Bowls of metal were also suspended in the

²⁶ Plato, *Apology*, 21a–23c.

²⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 31c–d. See *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 321, note 196; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 244n.

²⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 486; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 386–7.

²⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 186; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 92.

³⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 187; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 93. See also *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 487; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 388. Here Hegel seems to paraphrase from Etienne Clavier, *Mémoire sur les oracles des anciens*, p. 35: 'à Dodone l'avenir se manifestoit par des signes de trois espèces: savoir, par l'agitation des feuilles du chêne sacré; par le murmure de la fontaine sacrée; et par le bruit que faisoit le vase d'airain.'

grove. But the sounds of the bowls dashing against each other were quite indefinite, and had no objective sense; the sense—the signification—was imparted to the sounds only by the human beings who heard them. Thus also the Delphic priestesses, in a senseless, distracted state—in the intoxication of enthusiasm (*μανία*)—uttered unintelligible sounds; and it was the *μάντις* who gave to these utterances a definite meaning.³¹

There is thus a process of translation of the meaning into intelligible form. Initially there is simply the noise of nature, the wind, the ringing of the chimes, etc. Then the priestess in a heightened state gives human speech to these; this speech, although unintelligible, is nonetheless higher than nature since it is uttered by a human being. Then another priestess or prophet renders this unintelligible speech into something coherent. (Hegel notes the linguistic connection between the word for the madness or heightened state of the priestess, *μανία*, and the word for the priestess or prophet, *μάντις*, that is, the one in such a state.)

A higher stage of development occurred when these sounds of nature were translated into human speech in order to be made more intelligible. At Delphi the priestess, intoxicated by vapours that were emitted from the rock, spoke in a confused and discontinuous manner to convey the divine message. Again drawing on Clavier, Hegel gives another example of the way in which the knowledge of the god was articulated in human language:

In Achaëa, according to Pausanias, there was a statue of [Mercury] set up in the market; one burnt incense and whispered a question into the god's ear, then ran from the market clapping one's hands over one's ears; the first word one heard after taking one's hands away was the answer, which was then made to cohere intelligibly with the question through an interpretation.³²

The problem with the ancient oracles was that their statements, even in the form of human speech, were unclear and ambiguous. One could only act on them by interpreting them in a specific direction and ignoring the other possible meanings.

³¹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 236; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 311. See also *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 649; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 541: 'Thus the first mode of giving oracles, the noise and rustling of leaves and suspended cymbals, as in Dodona, is by mere natural sounds. Only later appears the figure of the priestess who gives the oracle in human tones (although in keeping with the oracle's mode she does not do so in clear speech).'

³² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 488; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 388. See also *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 187; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 93. Here Hegel seems to paraphrase from Clavier, *Mémoire sur les oracles des anciens*, p. 6: 'Nous devons plutôt nous en rapporter à Pausanias, témoin oculaire, et observateur très-exact. Il raconte qu'il y avoit à Phares en Achaëe, sur la place publique, une statue de Mercure Agoræus, qu'on consultoit de la manière suivante. On brûloit de l'encens sur l'autel, après avoir rempli d'huile les lampes placées en avant; on les allumoit, on mettoit une pièce de monnoie de cuivre sur l'autel; et après avoir fait une question à l'oreille du dieu, on sortoit de la place publique en se bouchant les oreilles avec les mains. En les ouvrant lorsqu'on étoit dehors, la première parole qu'on entendoit, étoit la réponse à la question.' The original source is Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Book VII, Chapter 22.

Once again the limited scope of human knowledge and agency is emphasized: 'In consulting oracles human beings posit themselves as unknowing, but the god as knowing. Unknowing, they wait on what the knowing god has to say.'³³ Hegel perhaps refers to the statement of Socrates who, explaining his divine mission to question people about what they claim to know, tells the jury at his defence, 'real wisdom is the property of god, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value.'³⁴

In Christianity God is wholly revealed in human form and conveys his divine message directly to his followers by means of human language. Christians can know the will of God since it has been revealed to them. They are worthy of this knowledge and have the freedom and rationality to act on it. By contrast, the Greeks do not have this kind of a clear revelation. At first the message is conveyed cryptically by the sounds of nature, and then at a later stage the no less enigmatic words of the priestesses must be interpreted. The Greek god does not represent clearly revealed knowledge, and the religious followers must act in ignorance, despite their attempts to gain clarity.

5.4 The Divine and the Work of Art: Sculpture

The Greek religion does not contain any dogma or doctrine; it does not formulate a belief system based on ideas.³⁵ Instead, it addresses itself to the senses. For this reason Hegel claims that an important element of the Greek religion is art and especially sculpture. The Greeks strove to express their conception of the divinities in the arts, and this provides a valuable source for understanding their religious views. Of course, other religions also made sculptures and painted depictions of their deities, but the Greeks' notion of beauty is something that separates Greek polytheism from other religions and constitutes one of its main characteristic traits.³⁶ Hegel thus constantly refers to the Greek religion as 'the religion of beauty'.

One of the central theses of Hegel's aesthetics is the idea that a work of art is higher than a product of nature.³⁷ This squares with his views of religion since the progressive movement of the world religions that he is tracing moves from nature

³³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 488, note 666; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 388n.

³⁴ Plato, *Apology*, 23a. English translation quoted from *Socrates' Defense (Apology)*, trans. by Hugh Tredennick, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, 11th printing, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982, p. 9.

³⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 174; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 80.

³⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 238; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 314: 'This stamps the Greek character as that of *individuality conditioned by beauty*, which is produced by Spirit, transforming the merely natural into an expression of its own being.'

³⁷ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, pp. 29–30; *Jub.*, vol. 12, pp. 54–7. *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, pp. 143–52; *Jub.*, vol. 12, pp. 200–12.

to spirit. Initially the divine appears in nature, but what one actually sees are the physical objects of sense. In order for these sense perceptions to be regarded as divine manifestations, the human mind must make a step of abstraction. It must see the concrete, particular, sensible impression as hiding or revealing some universal that lies behind it:

Natural phenomena or this immediate, external mode of appearing, however, are not appearance in the sense that the essence would be only a thought within us—as when we speak of the forces of nature and their expressions. Here it does not lie in the natural objects themselves, does not lie objectively in them as such, that they exist as appearances of what is inward; as natural objects they exist only for our sense perception, for which they are not an appearance of the universal. Thus it is not in light as such, for example, that thought, the universal, announces its presence; on the contrary, in the case of natural essence we must break through the outer shell behind which thought, or the inwardness of things, is hidden.³⁸

The natural object must be overcome and subordinated to the higher principle of spirit. Just as in their mythological stories the Greeks interpreted the phenomena of nature in terms of divine agency, thus transforming them into the realm of spirit, so also in art products of nature, a stone or a piece of marble, are changed into a product of spirit by the creative artistic process:

The Greek spirit is the plastic artist, forming the stone into a work of art. In this formative process the stone does not remain mere stone—the form being only superinduced from without; but it is made an expression of the spiritual, even contrary to its nature, and thus *transformed*.³⁹

Through art what were once mere stones become statues of the gods. Hegel has in mind here, for example, Phidias' statue of Zeus at the Temple at Olympia⁴⁰ or the statue of Athena in the Parthenon.⁴¹ Upon beholding these breath-taking works, one forgets their physical material and sees merely the god, the aspect of spirit.

Hegel claims that Greek sculpture owed a great debt to Egyptian art and indeed was in part derivative from it.⁴² But in contrast to the Egyptians, the Greeks made sculptures endowed with a special form of beauty that reflected the principle of spirit. The Greeks recognized that the proper form of the divine is spirit, that is,

³⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 656, note 404; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 548n.

³⁹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 239; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 314.

⁴⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 659, note 412; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 551n. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 755; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 638.

⁴¹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 239; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 315.

⁴² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 780; *Jub.*, vol. 13, p. 451.

the human form.⁴³ Unlike, for example, the sphinx, which was a mixed form still containing animal elements, the Greek gods represented in sculpture appear in wholly human form. The Egyptians' representations of human beings seem stiff and unnatural; they have not fully grasped the element of spirit and therefore are unable to represent it more adequately in painting or sculpture.

For Hegel, the special characteristic of the Greek religion in terms of its ability to express the gods in the form of art is, although in some way attractive, precisely its shortcoming. The problem that Hegel finds in the Greek depiction of the divine in art is that it takes nature as its point of departure and is still dependent on it: 'the artist *needs* for his spiritual conceptions, stone, colors, sensuous forms to express his idea.'⁴⁴ Even though the Greek divinities are gods of spirit, they are not wholly spirit since they are expressed using materials from nature:

Now in regard to the shape of the work of art, it would have to be said that it must be the shape of the self, for the god is the divine particular self, a spiritual universal power. But this power derives from the naturalness it possesses as posited, so it must still have the natural for its element of configuration, and it must become apparent that precisely the natural is the mode of expression of the divine. The god appears in the stone, the sensible still deems itself to be what is appropriate for the expression of the god as god.⁴⁵

Since these materials that constitute the work of art are objects of nature, the full spiritual element of the divine can never be ultimately captured in this way. This is inadequate, for Hegel, since the true expression of the divine is the human form with, so to speak, human material. A god made of stone cannot fully express all of the elements of spirit.

For this reason Christianity is higher than the Greek religion: Christ is a concrete, flesh-and-blood individual, not an object of stone. The full sphere of his subjectivity as spirit is revealed to his followers:

It is only then that sensible nature for the first time becomes free; that is to say, it is no longer wedded to the god, but shows itself to be unsuited to his shape.

⁴³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 661, note 416; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 553n: 'That only the human organization can be the shape of the spiritual was stated long ago by Aristotle, when he marked it as a defect of the doctrine of the transmigration of souls that on that view the corporeal organization of a human being would be merely contingent.' See also *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 477; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 377. *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 659ff.; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 651ff.

⁴⁴ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 239; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 314. See also *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 238–9; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 314.

⁴⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 476, note 627; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 376n.

Sensible nature, immediate singularity is nailed to the cross. Spirit as universal, the community, is the soil for God's appearance.⁴⁶

Of course, even a human being, although not a stone or a piece of wood, is in a sense a product of nature. Human beings have a physical body with natural drives and inclinations and must be freed from their tyranny by education and culture. Hegel interprets the Crucifixion and the death of Christ as the overcoming of this sensuous, natural element. The final physical element, the last remnant of nature in the divine, dies with Christ. With the step from the second to the third part of the Trinity, the Christian religion can be seen to be making its own movement away from nature to the perfection of spirit. Christianity thus goes one step further than the Greek religion and conceives of God as the Holy Spirit, in which the element of sense is overcome: 'The real defect of the Greek religion, as compared with the Christian, is, therefore, that in the former the *manifestation* constitutes the highest mode in which the divine being is conceived to exist—the sum and substance of divinity; while in the Christian religion the manifestation is regarded only as a *temporary phase* of the divine.'⁴⁷ The Greek religion has stopped short in the development of the concept of the divine, whereas the Christian religion has successfully run through the full development.

The Christian God contains the Jewish conception of the divine as a transcendent, universal thought: God the father and creator of the universe. It also contains the sensuous element of the Greek gods in the figure of Christ: God the son, a particular individual who is an object of sense perception. The Christian Trinity thus brings together these two strands of religious thought and creates something higher.⁴⁸ With the Holy Spirit these two elements come together in a speculative manner.

There is also a subjective element in Greek sculpture that provides an insightful contrast to Christianity. The god invests the sculptor with divine inspiration and pathos to perform the creative work. But this means that in the creative process the sculptor must surrender himself, allowing himself to be led by the external force of divine inspiration. There is nothing of the sculptor's own subjectivity in the work. When people view the sculpture, they praise it as a product of divine inspiration but not as a work expressing the individuality of the person who created it. So in order to create, the sculptor must in a sense eliminate himself and

⁴⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 476, note 627; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 376n. See also *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 249; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 325–6: 'But in referring to this common element of the Greek and the Christian religions, it must be said of both, that if a manifestation of God is to be supposed at all, his natural form must be that of Spirit, which for sensuous conception is essentially the human; for no other form can lay claim to spirituality.'

⁴⁷ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 249; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 326.

⁴⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 660, note 412; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 551n: 'The Jewish view that God is essentially for thought alone, and the sensuousness of the Hellenic beauty of shape, are equally contained in this process of the divine life and, being sublated, they are freed from their limitedness.'

his own subjectivity since this can only be an impediment to receiving the divine assistance.⁴⁹ The subjective freedom of the individual is thus not respected here. The subjectivity of the artist is not regarded as something valuable in itself. Again this is different in Christianity, where one does not need to give up one's individuality to be inspired by God. Christ recognizes the importance and absolute value of every individual. The sculpture does not express anything about the sculptor himself as an individual but was only the object of an external inspiration. In short, 'in his work . . . he did not produce a being *like himself*.'⁵⁰ But in Christ the individual believer sees another human being and recognizes something of himself in him. He is not asked to forfeit any of his own individuality or personality. His subjective freedom is celebrated and not suppressed.

5.5 The Divinity of the Roman Emperor

Like the Greeks, the Romans also deified heroes from their history. But what was especially striking was that in time they also deified the living emperor. One might think that Hegel would see in this an important forerunner to the conception of Jesus as a divinity, but instead he is keen to point out the shortcomings of the Roman conception. Given that the Romans were so focused on the activities of daily life and made divinities out of these activities and functions, they were keenly aware of which of these had power over the different aspects of their lives. In this context, it was natural that they came to think of the Roman emperor along the same lines since the emperor had supreme power over life and death, and operated wholly outside the usual legal structure. Thus, from this perspective it makes sense that the Romans worshipped their emperors as divinities.

The power of the Roman emperor can be said to have even exceeded some of the natural powers that were deified. Given that his powers were more sweeping than those of some of the more specialized gods, who governed specific natural spheres, it only made sense to regard him as a divinity, although he was still a living human being. Hegel notes:

⁴⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 660, note 412; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 552n: 'If manifestation falls on the subjective side in this process, so that God appears as something made by human beings, that is only *one* moment. For this positedness of God is mediated rather by the sublation of the singular self; that is why it was possible for the Greeks to intuit their god in the Zeus of Phidias.' *PhS*, pp. 426–7; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 538: 'Spirit is present in this individual as his universal and as the power over him from which he suffers violence, as his *pathos*, by giving himself over to which his self-consciousness loses its freedom. *PhS*, p. 429; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 540: 'What belongs to the substance, the artist gave entirely to his work, but to himself as a particular individuality he gave in his work no actual existence: he could impart perfection to his work only by emptying himself of his particularity, depersonalizing himself and rising to the abstraction of pure action.'

⁵⁰ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 429; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 541.

The emperor, this individual quite out of the ordinary, was this arbitrary power over the life and happiness of individuals and whole cities; his power reached much further than that of Robigo; famine and other public necessities awaited his summons—the goddess of hunger was at his call. Nor was this all. Status, birth, nobility, riches . . . were all his making.⁵¹

One of the enduring contributions of the Romans to Western civilization is Roman law. But yet despite all of their efforts in this regard, the emperor was the one person who was above the law, the one person for whom the law did not apply.⁵²

Hegel points out the dialectic between the multitude of individual gods and goddesses that the Romans worshipped and the single divinity, the Roman emperor. In an attempt to Romanize the conquered territories, the Romans co-opted the religions of the conquered people; a part of this was identifying the gods of other religions with divinities in their own pantheon. In this way the conquered peoples could see something of their own religious practices in those of the Romans. Hegel explains:

We see the Romans conquering Magna Graecia, Sicily, plundering and destroying the temples and carrying off whole shiploads of gods to Rome. In Rome there is toleration; all the religions come together there and are commingled: the Syrian, Egyptian, Jewish, Christian, Greek, Persian religions, Mithraism—the Romans seize on them all.⁵³

But while the Romans incorporate the different religions and deities, these are subordinated to the higher, overriding conception of the divine sovereignty, represented at first by Jupiter and then by the emperor.

The Roman religion consists in this fundamental contradiction. On the one hand, there is the supreme God and ruler, the emperor, and, on the other, a plethora of individual gods.⁵⁴ This is reflected in the relation of individuals. They

⁵¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 223; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 128.

⁵² Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 315; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 405: 'The political institutions were united in the person of the emperor; no moral bond any longer existed; the will of the emperor was supreme, and before him there was absolute equality. The freedmen who surrounded the emperor were often the mightiest in the empire; for caprice recognizes no distinction. In the person of the emperor isolated subjectivity has gained a perfectly unlimited realization.' See also Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 320; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 411: 'Individuals are thereby posited as atoms; but they are at the same time subject to the severe rule of the *One*, which as *monas monadum* is a power over private persons. . . That private right is therefore, *ipso facto*, a nullity, an ignoring of the personality; and the supposed condition of right turns out to be an absolute destitution of it. This contradiction is the misery of the Roman World.'

⁵³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 507; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 405. See also *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 696; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 587–8.

⁵⁴ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 292; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 371: 'He is a person, but the solitary person who stands over against all the rest. These constitute the real authoritative universality of that person; for the single individual as such is true only as a universal multiplicity of single individuals.'

too in some abstract way are a part of the higher supreme principle insofar as they too are a part of the Roman Empire and wish it to expand and prosper; but yet as individuals they also have many other individual desires and needs, hopes and dreams that are in no way acknowledged by this principle. In both cases there is a dialectic of the one and the many in which the many is not meaningfully recognized in the one. For this reason, the many remain alienated and unfulfilled, and the one becomes abstract and empty, which leads to arbitrariness.

One problem with this situation is that the Roman emperor does not represent a principle with any rational content. Rather he acts in an entirely arbitrary, often cruel and destructive manner. He is 'caprice absolutely unfettered'.⁵⁵ The ordinary Roman citizens are alienated by the emperor's irrational actions, and this undermines any sense of civic unity:

For his power is not the *union* and *harmony* of Spirit in which persons would recognize their own self-consciousness. Rather they exist, as persons, on their own account, and exclude any continuity with others from the rigid unyieldingness of their atomicity. They exist, therefore, in a merely negative relationship, both to one another and to him who is their bond of connection or continuity.⁵⁶

There is no meaningful recognition between the emperor and his subjects, and the relation is based solely on fear and intimidation.⁵⁷

The contradiction in the Roman religion lies in the dichotomy between the specific interests of the individual, which are admittedly recognized at some level, and the absolute higher principle represented by Roman sovereignty, which has no room for any aspects of the individual that do not further its end.⁵⁸ According to Hegel, it was the arbitrariness of the actions of the Roman emperor, in the absence of any meaningful institutional form of limitation or mediation, that ultimately led to the downfall of the Roman Empire. But while Hegel is critical of the abuses and cruelties committed by the Roman emperors, he sees in Rome an important development. Rome had a conception of right and justice that it extended to all of its citizens, but this was not strong enough since it could always be overturned at any point in time by the emperor. It was only the emperor who was protected by a much stronger and much broader notion. It was only the emperor who was thought to be divine. What was lacking was the realization that a spark of the divine can be found in every human being and not just one. This has

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 315; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 405–6.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 293; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 371. See also *PhS*, pp. 293–4; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 372: 'This truth consists in the fact that this *universally acknowledged authority* of self-consciousness is the reality from which it is alienated. This acknowledgement of its authority is the universal actuality of the self; but this actuality is directly the perversion of the self as well; it is the loss of its essence.'

⁵⁷ Cf. *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 307; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 396.

⁵⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 508; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 406.

important repercussions for both law and religion. In Christianity it is thought that everyone is created in the image of God. Human beings are spirit, just as God is spirit. With this realization a revolution takes place in the conception of what people are. This means that there is something absolutely important, valuable, and irreducible in every single human being and not just in one. Thus the Roman emperor in a sense, oddly, prepares the way for the Christian conception. He represents a certain limited principle that needs to be universalized.

5.6 Alienation, Anxiety, and the Need for Reconciliation

Hegel believes that in the concrete historical situation in the Roman world, people perceived a great sense of alienation with their external world, which was oppressive. This was relevant for the Roman province of Judea, which suffered from a heavy-handed Roman occupation.⁵⁹ The Roman world was ruled by a dictator, the emperor, who held the power of life and death over everyone. Any statement or action in the public sphere was potentially dangerous. As a result many people, even from noble senatorial families, simply withdrew from public life. For Hegel, the philosophical schools of Skepticism and Stoicism were a natural reflection of this situation.⁶⁰ The former taught that there was no truth in the external world. Everything that one believed could be established as true could always be demolished by critical reason, which was the only valid tool. One should thus focus on cultivating this inner critical faculty, which alone was thought to have any value. Similarly, Stoicism rejected the external world. For the Stoics, the world was at best a distraction and at worst something sinful and decadent that should be avoided. They enjoined their followers to withdraw into themselves where true virtue could be found. For Hegel, these were natural results of the perception that truth could not be found in the external sphere.

While Skepticism and Stoicism believed that they had a solution to the problem, they could not avoid the consequence that in the end, they still dwelled in a situation of alienation with the external world. They encouraged individuals to build up an inner sphere that was separate from the existing actuality around them, which was always something separate and opposed to the inner realm that individuals were supposed to cultivate. People thus felt an acute sense of alienation both with themselves and with the external world and yearned for some kind of reconciliation. This precipitated the rise of Christianity, which provided the possibility for reconciliation in the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Revelation.

⁵⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 308; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 231.

⁶⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 308; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 232. See also 'Freedom of Self-Consciousness: Stoicism, Scepticism, and the Unhappy Consciousness,' in *PhS*, pp. 119–38; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 158–81.

According to Hegel, the sense of alienation that people felt also stems from a conception of humans as divided beings. He gives a detailed analysis of the story of the Fall and the debates about whether humans are good or evil by nature.⁶¹ These debates at the time presumably arose from Rousseau's claim that humans were originally good and that they lived harmoniously in the state of nature. According to Rousseau, only with the vice and decadence of society and civilization do their natural instincts become warped and people become evil. This view had a strong appeal at the time, and Hegel is keen to refute it with his usual dialectical approach.

His basic view is that humans have a natural side with desires and drives, which is dominant in the early development of human beings. This is associated with evil since when people act immediately on these desires they are acting selfishly and immorally. But the concept of what it is to be human is to overcome these and to develop a rational capacity. He argues that the question about whether humans are good or evil by nature is posed incorrectly since it is not a dichotomy.⁶² Humans are never simply one or the other. While humans were originally like the animals and were constituted by natural drives and desires, this is not their true concept. They are always implicitly good, even if they have not yet realized this. Likewise, while humans have a rational element that separates them from nature, they are not pure reason and always retain a natural element in themselves. So humans are neither wholly good nor wholly evil. Instead, they are complex creatures which develop over time.

The sense of self-alienation that human beings feel comes from this basic condition that they have conflicting elements in themselves. Hegel explains: 'Human beings are inwardly conscious that in their innermost being they are a contradiction, and have therefore an infinite *anguish* concerning themselves.'⁶³ The concept of anxiety is an important motif in existentialist literature, and thus it is surprising for some to see that this is an important concept for Hegel and indeed a fundamental part of his philosophical anthropology. Anxiety is the awareness of the conflict or split within oneself. We have a natural side that leads us to sin, and our consciousness of this is what separates us from God.

Hegel gives an interesting example with Zoroastrianism, a religion that he treated previously in his lectures.⁶⁴ Zoroastrianism is dualistic, with a god of good (Ormuzd) and a god of evil (Ahriman), who are forever in conflict: 'In the Parsee religion, we saw that good and evil, light and darkness, stand in universal antithesis to each other. There, however, the antithesis is *external* to human

⁶¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 295–310; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 219–33.

⁶² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 299; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 224.

⁶³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 305; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 229. See also *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 323, note 199; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 246n.

⁶⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 352–8; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 254–9. *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 609–25; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 504–18. *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 737–8; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 624–5. *NR*, pp. 186–99.

beings, and they themselves are outside it.’⁶⁵ On this view, neither good nor evil is a part of human nature. Instead, they are real elements or forces in the universe itself. Something good took place since in the given case the god of the good happened to win out, or something evil occurred since the opposite happened. Thus good and evil are conceived as something external in the world. By contrast, the key with Christianity is the realization that good and evil are both a part of human nature. They come from the inside and not from the outside. With this realization comes the ability to regard human beings as moral agents and to ascribe responsibility and accountability to them. In the Zoroastrian picture, humans are at the mercy of the forces of nature, which include good and evil. They are not responsible for their actions since they can always say that they were compelled to do something by the god of evil and darkness. By contrast, when good and evil are both a part of the human being, then they must take responsibility for their actions.

But the awareness of this inward dual nature is the cause of distress. From this deep sense of anxiety comes a great sorrow and desire for reconciliation: ‘Reconciliation is what is demanded by the need of the subject, and this exigency resides in the subject as infinite unity or as self-identity.’⁶⁶ Human beings have a deep inner yearning to overcome this dualism in their own nature and to be united with God. This can only happen when the natural element in themselves is overcome. Hegel explains the basic precondition for this:

The possibility of reconciliation is present only when the implicitly subsisting unity of divine and human nature is known. Human beings can know themselves to be taken up into God only when God is not something alien to them, only when they are not merely an extrinsic accident upon God’s nature, but rather when they are taken up into God in accordance with their essence and freedom.⁶⁷

In order to achieve reconciliation, humans must overcome their natural desires and see themselves as a part of the divine.

Hegel takes this notion of reconciliation to be a defining characteristic of Christianity that distinguishes it from Judaism and Islam. He explains:

Since what is at issue is the consciousness of absolute reconciliation, we are here in the presence of a new consciousness of humanity, or a new religion. Through it a new world is constituted, a new actuality, a different world-condition, because

⁶⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 304–5; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 228.

⁶⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 310; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 233. See Thomas A. Lewis, ‘Religion, Reconciliation, and Modern Society: The Shifting Conclusions of Hegel’s *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*,’ *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 106, no. 1, 2013, pp. 37–60.

⁶⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 314, note 173; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 239n.

[humanity's] outward determinate being, [its] natural existence, now has religion as its substantiality.⁶⁸

This passage is a vague echo of 2 Corinthians 5:17: 'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new!' Thus with Christ something fundamental changes that makes it possible to overcome the basic human anxiety and achieve the desired reconciliation. Hegel takes this to be the meaning of the idea of the Kingdom of God. This is not something that exists elsewhere in the future or some transcendent sphere. Instead, it is here and now, having been made possible by Christ.⁶⁹ The Kingdom of God means God is present in the world.

According to Hegel, the deep sense of alienation and the need for reconciliation that was dominant in the Roman world thus gives rise to Christianity, which answers this need. Christianity presents a new conception of what it is to be a human being and a new conception of the relation to the world and to God. Humans only fully overcome nature during this historical period when they conceive of themselves with an inward sphere or spirit. This makes it possible for humans to be truly free for the first time. The changed conception of the human is reflected in the conception of the God of Christianity. Hegel believes that this view prepared the way for the conception of inwardness and subjectivity that is characteristic of the modern world.

⁶⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 317; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 241.

⁶⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 318–19; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 241–2 *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 322; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 245–6.

6

Hegel's Philosophical Interpretation of Christianity

Hegel's account of Christianity is closely connected with his philosophical anthropology. He claims that the need for Christianity arises from the demand for reconciliation, which comes from the human condition of alienation and separation. The story of Jesus, he believes, also represents the universal development of human beings in their overcoming of nature. Here we can see Hegel's systematic thinking at work, where anthropology, history, and religion are not regarded as separate fields but are all closely intertwined.

We have seen above that Hegel's ultimate goal is to defend and restore the traditional Christian dogmas in the wake of the criticisms of them. He believes that theology has betrayed its mission and so the proper defence for the dogmas is philosophical. This means that we must examine the traditional dogmas and see how Hegel grounds them anew by giving them a specifically philosophical interpretation.

6.1 Christianity and Freedom

One counterintuitive element of Hegel's theory is that religion is closely connected with human freedom. Different cultures have different conceptions of themselves which are transformed into different conceptions of their deities. In previous cultures, according to Hegel, there was no conception of the true freedom of human beings, and for this reason people were not recognized as free beings in their religion and in their relations to their gods. Hegel's claim is that only in Christianity is human freedom realized. This is a polemical and controversial claim, and so we need to try to understand what exactly Hegel means by it.

In his historical overview of the world religions, he traces the movement from nature to spirit. The early religions worshipped natural entities as their divinities: heavenly bodies, rivers, mountains, plants, and animals. This was what these religions conceived as the highest. For Hegel, this means that these peoples still remain largely in the realm of nature. They have not yet grasped the idea of spirit, which dwells in the human and which is higher than nature. By contrast in Greek and Roman polytheism the gods are anthropomorphic. Here the human element is recognized as something higher. This means that there is an inward sphere of

subjectivity and rationality that has begun to develop. For Hegel, this story of the development of the world religions is a story of human liberation, as people emerge from nature and realize the inward human element that he calls spirit. This process, as noted, culminates in Christianity, which fully recognizes and enables human freedom. Hegel explains:

This freedom of the subject is its rationality—the fact that as subject it is thus liberated and has attained this liberation through religion, that in accord with its religious vocation it is essentially free. This freedom, which has the impulse and determinacy to realize itself, is rationality. Slavery contradicts Christianity because it is contrary to reason. What is required, therefore, is that this reconciliation should also be accomplished in the worldly realm.¹

This explains in part Christianity's conflict with the Roman world at the time of its inception since the Roman world was built on, among other things, the institution of slavery.

What specifically is the rational or the human element that Hegel sees as developing in human beings over time? To illustrate this, we might use the example of small children. When children are born, they act immediately on their natural desires. They have to be taught to control their desires and to defer the satisfaction of them. At first, parents and teachers play the role of teaching children to restrain their natural impulses. Then laws and customs take over this role as the children grow older. Adolescents, who stand somewhere between childhood and adulthood, often go through a period of rebellion since they come to reject the views of their parents and the established customs and laws, which they regard as arbitrary and oppressive. These laws and customs appear as 'positive' in Hegel's language, that is, they come from the outside and are dictated to people externally. Adolescents often exist in a state of alienation from these things, and this manifests itself by their acting out or openly defying the accepted norms and rules. For Hegel, this is a state where human rationality and freedom are not yet fully developed. One is not free when one acts on one's immediate selfish desires and drives. True freedom is only possible when humans reach a point where they can see their own will reflected in the laws. Hegel explains:

Laws—e.g., civil laws, laws of the state—are likewise something positive: they come to us and are there for us as valid. They are not merely something external for us, as are sensible objects, so that we can leave them behind or pass them by; rather, in their externality, they also ought to have, for us subjectively, an essential, subjectively binding power. When we grasp or recognize the law, when

¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 340; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 263–4.

we find it rational that crime should be punished, this is not because law is positive but rather because it has an essential status for us. It is not simply valid for us externally because it is so; rather it is also valid for us internally, it is rationally valid as something essential, because it also is itself internal and rational.²

Everything depends here on how we understand our relation to the external world. When young people perceive certain laws or customs as unjust or repressive, they feel alienated from them since these laws do not correspond to their own inward sense of what is just and right. Later, however, as adults, they come to recognize that certain laws, such as those prohibiting murder and theft, are in fact rational and make good sense. Fully developed adults can affirm these laws with their own rationality. They feel at home in a world with such laws.

Hegel points out the inward element of this dynamic by comparing this with our perception of the world. We are always confronted with things in the external world that we perceive with our senses. We routinely note that they exist and think little more of it:

All truth, even sensible truth—although it is not truth in the proper sense—comes to people initially in the form of authority; i.e., it is something present that possesses validity and exists on its own account. That is how it comes to me—as something distinct from me. Similarly, the world comes to us in sense perception as an authority confronting us: it is, we find it so, we accept it as something that is really there and relate ourselves to it as such. That is how it is, and it is valid just the way it is.³

There is, however, something different in our perception of human laws and customs. While these also confront us as something coming from the outside since we did not make them, nonetheless we are implicitly called upon to evaluate them and give our consent to them. When we see some object in the external world, we say, 'It exists.' However, when we are confronted with a given law or custom, we say, 'It is right' or 'It is just.'⁴ Our inward rationality is called upon to examine the issue critically in a way that is not the case with simple objects of nature that we perceive. Although laws and customs are positive, coming from without, we accept them since they are in accordance with our own rational will.

This is the picture of freedom that Hegel wants to emphasize. Human freedom means having this inward sphere of rationality, which is able to recognize and give

² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 252–3; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 180.

³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 335; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 258.

⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 335; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 258: 'Custom is something that is valid, an established conviction. But because it is something spiritual, we do not say, "It is," but rather, "It is right."'

its consent to the external sphere of, for example, custom and law insofar as it is rational. As the example of children and adolescents illustrates, this is something that requires that humans have reached a certain level of development. As humans develop, their inward rational side grows. As it grows the natural side, that is governed by immediate drives and desires, is increasingly given less and less space. This is something that takes place in each and every human being, as we grow from childhood to adulthood, but it is also something that takes place historically, as humans emerge from nature. This is the story of how subjectivity and inwardness arise and develop in human beings over time.

Hegel's basic point of departure is thus this picture of philosophical anthropology, which involves a long development of the human capacities, including rationality and freedom. The key to understanding his philosophy of religion is to see how this anthropology is related to the different conceptions of the divine that he sketches. His thesis is that of all the religions, Christianity alone recognizes and cultivates the inward nature of the human being. This can be seen in, among other things, his interpretation of the story of Jesus.

6.2 The Revelation

The first part of the story of Jesus is embodied in the doctrine of the Revelation.⁵ God reveals himself to human beings by taking on human form in the world. He thus enters into a concrete historical time and place. This is essential for overcoming the sense of anxiety and self-alienation that Hegel believes is a fundamental part of the human condition. As long as God remains distant and inaccessible, no reconciliation is possible. The transcendent God is unattainable for the believer. For this reason it is necessary that the God enter into the human sphere and reveal himself. Hegel thus takes the Revelation to be a defining feature of Christianity that separates it from Judaism and Islam. For this reason he dubs Christianity 'the revealed religion' or 'the revelatory religion'.⁶

⁵ See Paolo Diego Bubbio, 'God, Incarnation, and Metaphysics in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion,' *Sophia*, vol. 53, no. 4, 2014, pp. 515–33. Rob Devos, 'The Significance of Manifest Religion in the *Phenomenology*,' in *Hegel on Ethical Life, Religion and Philosophy. 1793–1807*, ed. by André Wylleman, Leuven and Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1989, pp. 195–229. Dominique Dubarle, 'Révélation de Dieu et manifestation de l'Esprit dans la Philosophie de la Religion de Hegel,' in *Manifestation et révélation*, by Stanislas Breton et al., Paris: Editions Beauchesne 1976, pp. 77–206. Hans Küng, *Menschwerdung Gottes. Eine Einführung in Hegels theologischen Denken als Prolegomena zu einer künftigen Christologie*, Freiburg, Basel, Vienna: Herder 1970. (In English as *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as a Prolegomena to a Future Christology*, trans. by J. R. Stephenson, New York: Crossroad 1987.) Joseph Fitzer, 'Hegel and the Incarnation: A Response to Hans Küng,' *Journal of Religion*, vol. 52, 1972, pp. 240–67. Pierre Fruchon, 'Sur la conception hégélienne de la "religion révélée" selon M. Theunissen,' *Archives de Philosophie*, vol. 48, 1985, pp. 613–41; vol. 49, 1986, pp. 619–42. Max Josef Suda, 'Das Christentum als "Offenbare Religion" in Hegels *Phänomenologie des Geistes*,' *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, vol. 3, 2001, pp. 253–8.

⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 250; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 177. *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 252; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 179.

According to Hegel, the human feeling of anguish and alienation cannot be overcome merely by human beings themselves: 'In this respect it may be said that the subject does not attain reconciliation on its own account, i.e., as this [single] subject and in virtue of its [own] activity or conduct.'⁷ Here we can hear the voice of Luther and his argument that salvation is achieved by faith and not good works. For Hegel, the desired reconciliation can only be achieved by God, specifically by God entering the world. In this way God becomes determinate and is no longer an abstraction.

There is a deep philosophical point behind the well-known religious dogma. We have ideas in our head, which we try to realize in the world. We might want to write a book, build a house, paint a painting. In each case, I have in my mind an idea before I start. The first step is to create, for example, the outline of the book, the blueprints for the house, or the preliminary sketch of the painting. This begins a process by which I transfer my idea into the realm of actuality. Then I set to work to create the thing itself. When I am done with the work, I have the actual object itself as an existent physical entity in the world: a real book, house, or painting. This is a complex process with many stages. It begins with an idea and ends with a real object or thing. As long as it remained an idea, it was something abstract. We are never completely certain of how it will turn out. It can be realized in an infinite number of ways. Only when we are finished and we have the final product can we see if our idea was a good one. The psychological point at issue is that there is something unsatisfying about just having an idea that is never realized in the real world. I might want very much to write a book, but I might never have the time to do so. I might very much want to build the house of my dreams, but I might never have the financial resources to realize the project. In these cases, there is a sense of frustration associated with the unrealized idea. True gratification only comes when the project is actualized, when I can actually see my idea as an object in the world.

The idea of the Revelation is something like this. As long as God is just an idea, there is something unsatisfying. This conception of God is an abstraction. Reconciliation is only possible when God is revealed in the human sphere. He actualized himself in space and time in the real world. For Hegel, this is a much more fulfilling and gratifying conception of the divine than is found in Judaism, Islam, or Deism. But this implies that God is not something static. Instead, the divine is a dynamic movement from the universal (the idea), to the particular (the concrete thing), that is, the Revelation.

With the Revelation, God reveals himself to human beings in the world. Prior to this, God remained a transcendent deity, that is, God as the creator of the universe. This God of Judaism is a distant God, who is beyond nature and separate from the

⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 310; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 234.

world. Of course, at the beginning of Genesis God appears to Adam and Eve in the Garden, but the clear tendency of the Hebrew Bible as it develops is for God to appear less and less frequently. The transcendent nature of the divine is reflected in the prohibition against any representations of God and the critical relation of Judaism to the religions of nature (for example, Baal or the golden calf), which conceive of the gods as natural forces. Hegel notes that this Judaic conception of God as transcendent is abstract and therefore empty, that is, this God has no content.⁸ Moreover, since this God is infinitely distant, the criteria for truth and justice are placed outside the world. Humans thus come to despair of this world since it is godless. The view of the unhappy consciousness from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is that we dwell in a world of sin and injustice since we are forever separated from God. The external world is something corrupt. The situation leads to an extreme sense of alienation since people are prisoners of this world. They are thus obsessed with their own sinfulness and bemoan their distant relation to God, as is seen in, for example, the Psalms and the Lamentations.

For Hegel, the Revelation is the solution to this situation. By revealing himself in the world, God shows that he is a part of this world. Thus, truth and justice are no longer something unattainable but rather a part of the existing mundane sphere itself, within the reach of human beings. Christ's existence as a human being shows people that truth can exist in this world and that we as human beings can participate in it. We are not forever cut off from it, but instead, with our inward rational sphere, we are a part of it. It lies in the nature of God to realize himself and make himself concrete in the world. The universal must become particular.

A part of this is also Hegel's rejection of the Deist concept of God, which, as we have seen, Hegel has criticized as abstract and empty. This conception deprives the world of truth, which is placed elsewhere. The only truth that was recognized by the Enlightenment thinkers was that which came from hardheaded scientific thinking. But, for Hegel, this has nothing to do with religion, which operates at a higher level.

6.3 Miracles

The revelation is understood as God's showing himself or making himself known to human beings. Similarly, the idea of miracles has traditionally been regarded as external evidence for the proof of divine power. They come from the outside and make an appeal to the sense perception of individuals. Since they were understood as interruptions in the natural order of things, miracles were scorned by the thinkers of the Enlightenment as simple superstition.

⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 279–80; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 204–5.

Here again Hegel argues that the Enlightenment thinkers have fully misconceived the nature of religion by focusing their critical energy on this point. He argues that the senses are the lowest human faculty and to persuade someone of something based on the senses does not represent the full exercise or development of freedom, which requires the faculty of thought. He acknowledges that miracles 'certainly can bring about a kind of verification for human beings as sentient beings. But that is only the beginning of verification, it is the sensible or as it were unspiritual verification, by which precisely what is spiritual cannot be verified.'⁹ Hegel refers to the efforts by the Enlightenment thinkers to understand the miracles in terms of natural phenomena. He claims that this is to miss the point: 'the understanding can attempt to explain the miracles naturally, it can advance many probabilities against them; but this involves confining one's attention to the external, eventlike character of miracles and directing one's arguments against this aspect.'¹⁰ The truth of Christianity is an idea, something of spirit, and this cannot be demonstrated by the senses any more than mathematics can. This truth must be grasped by the higher cognitive faculties: 'This is what can be called "the witness of the spirit."¹¹

Hegel gives examples from both the Old and the New Testament that are intended to show that although miracles are performed by, for example, Moses, this should not be understood as the basis of faith. Hegel paraphrases a passage from Matthew where Jesus warns people of imposters who attempt to attract attention by miracles: 'After my death many will come who perform miracles in my name, but I have not recognized them.'¹² Hegel cites another passage where Jesus refuses to perform miracles when he is requested to do so by the Pharisees (Matthew 12:38–9).¹³ From this he reasons, 'Here Christ himself rejects miracles as a genuine criterion of truth. This is the essential point, and we must hold fast to it. Verification by miracles, as well as the attack upon miracles, belong to a lower sphere that concerns us not at all.'¹⁴ Hegel takes this as evidence for his claim that the true witness is the faculty of spirit or reason and not the senses. The truth of Christianity can neither be verified by miracles nor refuted by debunking them.

The true witness of the spirit involves the higher faculties, but this means more than simply pure rationality. Hegel explains that the witness of spirit can take many forms:

In history, all that is noble, lofty, and divine, speaks to us internally; to it our spirit bears witness. This witness may remain nothing more than this general

⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 254; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 181–2.

¹⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 254; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 182.

¹¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 254; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 182.

¹² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 255; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 182. This seems to be a reference to Matthew 7:22–3: 'On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?" Then I will declare to them, "I never knew you: go away from me, you evildoers."'

¹³ See also Matthew 7:22–3, John 4:48.

¹⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 255; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 182.

resonance, this inner agreement, this empathy and sympathy. But beyond this, the witness of spirit may also be connected with insight and thought.¹⁵

Here one recalls the complex hierarchy of the forms of human cognition that Hegel outlines in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*. Any of these forms could in principle be used in this context. Given that in that hierarchy conceptual or philosophical knowing stands at the top, it is not surprising when Hegel claims that 'the witness of spirit in its highest form is that of philosophy, according to which the concept develops the truth purely as such from itself without presuppositions.'¹⁶ But Hegel is not arguing for an exclusively intellectual approach to Christianity, and he is not privileging the scholar to the common believer. On the contrary, he recognizes that people approach Christianity differently in accordance with their different abilities and background: 'But the witness of the spirit can be present in manifold and various ways; it is not required that for all of humanity the truth be brought forth in a philosophical way.'¹⁷

The issue of miracles is also related to that of the veracity of the Biblical stories, which, as we have seen,¹⁸ was a key question that occupied figures from the Enlightenment such as Lessing and Reimarus. One can also approach the Bible with different cognitive faculties. One can agree to its truth based merely on the powerful effect that the reading of it has on one's senses. But once again there are also higher levels of cognition that can be used. One can critically reflect upon and contemplate the stories recounted in the Bible. One can try to understand them in terms of the key dogmas of the Christian religion: 'These thoughts and considerations result in a developed religion; in its most highly developed form it is *theology* or scientific religion, whose content, as the witness of spirit, is [also] known in scientific fashion.'¹⁹ Hegel notes that there are people who reject an overly scholarly approach to religion and claim that one should simply stick to a simple reading of the Bible. In this context he mentions the great critic of Reimarus and Lessing, Johann Melchior Goeze, as someone who is content simply to repeat quotations from the Bible without any deeper attempt to understand and interpret them.²⁰ While Hegel grants that this may be suitable for some people given their level of education, it is not the highest form of witness of the spirit with respect to the Bible. For this reason, reflection and thoughtful consideration must enter into the process of Biblical exegesis.

When people approach the Bible and Christian dogmatics with their own subjective ideas, they often miss the key points since their prejudices and predetermined agenda shape their analyses. When theologians work in this way, what

¹⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 255; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 182–3.

¹⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 256; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 183.

¹⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 256; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 183–4.

¹⁸ See this volume, Chapter 1, Section 1.4.

¹⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 258; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 185.

²⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 258, note 29; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 185n.

they produce is more a reflection of their own thinking than an analysis of the actual subject matter of Christianity. Again Hegel complains that this is one of the reasons why the key dogmas of Christianity have disappeared from theology. As a result, philosophy must come to the rescue of these Christian dogmas: 'Philosophy is preeminently, though not exclusively, what is at present essentially orthodox; the propositions that have always been valid, the basic truths of Christianity, are maintained and preserved by it.'²¹ For Hegel this means that understanding Christianity in terms of the Notion or the Concept holds the key to demonstrating the truth of the lost dogmas. The natural order of things is that we begin as children to understand Christianity as something outward, something positive, but now we need to abandon this and try to understand it philosophically, as an embodiment of the Notion.

6.4 The Death of Christ

Hegel's understanding of Christ is highly relevant for his attempt to restore the Christian dogmas.²² Another important part of the story of Christ is represented in the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. Once again Hegel offers a philosophical interpretation of the religious dogmas. God is incarnated and enters the world as a human being, and, as a part of the world of actuality, he also has a part of the natural in himself that all humans have. Due to this he must die, just as all natural beings die. But with the Resurrection, it is shown that this natural side is overcome. In other words, the long struggle of spirit with nature has finally ended with spirit being victorious.

Human beings remain in a sense divided. We still have natural desires and drives. But the key with Christianity is that these are now regarded as overcome. They no longer determine us as was the case at previous stages of development.

²¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 262; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 188.

²² See Emilio Brito, *La Christologie de Hegel: Verbum Crucis*, Paris: Beauchesne 1983. Stephen Crites, 'The Gospel According to Hegel,' *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 46, 1966, pp. 246–63. Stephen Crites, 'The Golgotha of Absolute Spirit,' in *Method and Speculation in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. by Merold Westphal, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press 1982, pp. 47–55. Stephen Crites, *Dialectic and Gospel in the Development of Hegel's Thinking*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press 1998. Peter Hodgson, 'Hegel's Christology: Shifting Nuances in the Berlin Lectures,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 53, no. 1, 1985, pp. 23–40. Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005, pp. 155–76. Philip M. Merklinger, *Philosophy, Theology, and Hegel's Berlin Philosophy of Religion, 1821–1827*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1993, pp. 169–75. Cyril O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1994, pp. 189–234. Martin Wendte, *Gottmenschliche Einheit bei Hegel. Eine logische und theologische Untersuchung*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2007. James Yerkes, *The Christology of Hegel*, Missoula, MT: Scholars Press 1978; 2nd ed., Albany: State University of New York Press 1983. Walter Jaeschke, *Reason in Religion: The Foundations of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, trans. by J. Michael Stewart and Peter C. Hodgson, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1990, pp. 311–37.

Christianity thus celebrates the victory of reason over the natural desires. It recognizes the existence of our natural desires but no longer sees them as a threat undermining our character. This is represented symbolically in the death of Christ: 'For in the idea, the otherness of the Son is a transitory, disappearing moment, not a true, essentially enduring, absolute moment.'²³

Hegel is critical of the views that focus on the person of Christ as a simple empirical entity. This is the intuition that attempts to hold fast to the physical things surrounding his person. The desire to capture the Holy Land, to recover splinters from the cross, and to find the funeral shroud or the holy grail are all manifestations of a mistaken focus on the empirical, according to Hegel. This is a mistake since it takes the message and significance of Jesus to be in the physical aspect alone. Instead, his message is one that concerns the higher faculty of spirit and not just the senses. This can also be regarded as a part of Hegel's critical view of Catholicism, which makes an appeal to the senses with the use of beautiful paintings, sculptures, and incense. For Hegel, this mistakenly substitutes the empirical for the spiritual. Hegel believes that Lutheranism captures better the true spiritual nature of Christianity by its rejection of ornate decoration.

The death of Jesus demonstrates that although he was the incarnation of God, he was truly a human being.²⁴ This is a recognition that the finite nature that one knows from oneself is also a part of the divine. Thus one is not radically separated from God as before. But then by returning from the dead, he shows that the natural has been overcome:

But the death of Christ is the death of this death itself, the negation of negation ... Concerning Christ's death, we have still finally to emphasize the aspect that it is God who has put death to death, since he comes out of the state of death. In this way, finitude, human nature, and humiliation are posited of Christ—as of him who is strictly God—as something alien.²⁵

Although humans have natural drives and desires, this is what is finite and passing. Their true nature is something higher.

In his analysis of Tibetan Buddhism, Hegel notes that the Tibetans revere the Dalai Lama as a living divinity in human form. This invites comparison to the Christian dogma of the divinity of Christ. Hegel claims that since the Buddhists do not recognize the inward sphere of subjectivity, what they revere is the physical person of the Dalai Lama and not spirit. Instead, when Christians revere Christ, they recognize his inward spiritual side as the most important thing: 'When God is worshipped in human shape in the Christian religion, that is something altogether

²³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 332; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 255.

²⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 323, note 199; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 246n.

²⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 324, note 199; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 246n.

different; for the divine essence is there envisioned in the man who has suffered, died, risen again, and ascended to heaven. That is not humanity in its sensuous, immediate existence, but a humanity that bears upon its face the shape of spirit.²⁶ With the doctrines of the Resurrection and the Ascension, it is clear that what is revered by Christians is the spiritual element in Christ and not merely his physical person.

Hegel touches on the contemporary discussions that exercised Reimarus and Lessing concerning the historicity of Jesus. If much of what comes down to us in the historical record about Jesus is a lie or a fabrication, then this would seem to undermine Christian faith. But Hegel, like Lessing, disagrees. He argues:

As to the empirical mode of the appearance, and investigations concerning the conditions surrounding the appearance of Christ after his death, the church is right insofar as it refuses to acknowledge such investigations; for the latter proceed from a point of view implying that the real question concerns the sensible and historical elements in the appearance [of Christ], as though the confirmation of the Spirit depended on narratives of this kind about something represented as [merely] historical, in historical fashion. It is said that the Holy Scriptures should be treated like the writings of profane authors. One can do this with regard to what concerns the merely historical, the finite and external. But for the rest, it is a matter of comprehension by the Spirit; the profane [aspect] is not the attestation of the Spirit.²⁷

Hegel's point is that it is impossible to determine the nature of Christ from the historical record. There is no scientific test or demonstration that can be done to determine the divinity of Christ based on empirical evidence. This is the Enlightenment's misunderstanding and attempt to apply its own criteria for truth to a sphere where they are not relevant.

In this context Hegel refers to the idea of the death of God,²⁸ which although made famous by Nietzsche, in fact comes from a much earlier time.²⁹ As the foregoing analysis has shown, Hegel takes this to mean something entirely different from Nietzsche:

"God himself is dead," it says in a Lutheran hymn, expressing an awareness that the human, the finite, the fragile, the weak, the negative are themselves a moment of the divine, that they are within God himself, that finitude, negativity, otherness

²⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 570, note 160; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 467n.

²⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 330–1; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 253–4.

²⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 323, note 199; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 246n. *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 326; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 250.

²⁹ The editorial note refers to the hymn from 1641 'O Trauigkeit, O Herzeleid' by Johannes Rist. *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 326, note 205; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 249n.

are not outside of God and do not, as otherness, hinder unity with God. Otherness, the negative, is known to be a moment of the divine nature itself.³⁰

For Hegel, this is not a statement about the lapse of religious belief in the modern world. Instead, it is an important part of understanding the nature of the divine in the Christian religion.

We will see below that the issue of the nature of Christ was an important point of debate in the critical reception of Hegel's philosophy of religion.³¹ This debate can be captured in Hegel's concluding reflections on the nature of Christ, where he says that what humans learn from this history is 'that the idea of God has certainty for them, that humanity has attained the certainty of unity with God, that the human is the immediately present God.'³² The final claim can be taken to mean that there is no God beyond the merely human. In other words, the culmination of the development of the world religions is the awareness that the human is what is the highest. It is clear, however, that this secular interpretation is not Hegel's view. The key to interpreting this lies in the words 'the immediately present'. In other words, the incarnate God is just one aspect of the divine, namely, the divine as immediately present, but this is not the end of the story. The full conception of God involves more than just this, specifically, the God in the form of the spirit of the community. Thus, Hegel would presumably reject the secular interpretations of his view here just as he rejects the Enlightenment's naturalistic explanations of the miracles and the divine history.

The true meaning of the death of Christ is that of reconciliation: 'This is the explication of reconciliation: that God is reconciled with the world, or rather that God has shown himself to be reconciled with the world, that even the human is not something alien to him, but rather that this otherness, this self-distinguishing, finitude as it is expressed, is a moment in God himself, although, to be sure, it is a disappearing moment.'³³ In this way Christianity overcomes the anguish felt in the Roman world. It reunites humans with God and with themselves.

6.5 The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is also a key Christian dogma for Hegel, to which he is keen to give a philosophical interpretation.³⁴ He is aided in this effort by the fact that the

³⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 326; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 249–50.

³² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 326; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 250.

³³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 327; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 250.

³⁴ See William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?* Aldershot: Ashgate 2003, pp. 167–86. John Smith, 'Hegel's Reinterpretation of the Doctrine of Spirit and Religious Community,' in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Darrel E. Christensen, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1970, pp. 158–77. Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 177–204. Alan M. Olson, *Hegel and the Spirit: Philosophy as Pneumatology*, Princeton:

³¹ See Chapter 8, Section 8.4 below.

dogma itself contains his favourite philosophical term 'spirit'. This allows him to put this Christian idea into the context of his own theory of self-consciousness. He began his lectures by saying that the true nature of God is spirit knowing itself. Now he is in a position to cast Christianity in the role of the sole true religion which features a God that meets this description.

The dogma itself states that the third person of the divine is the Holy Spirit, which is the spirit of God in the Christian community. First, Hegel claims that this is a necessary development from the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. While it was necessary for God to reveal himself and to enter into the physical mundane sphere, this is something transitory, and, as was seen above, it results in the death of Christ. What is needed is something more enduring. This is what is found in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Christ the Son, returns to God the Father, and the particular and the universal are united in the Holy Spirit. The idea of the spirit of God in the Christian community is not a physical entity that is perishable but yet it is something in the world and not something abstract and transcendent. The Holy Spirit thus provides the enduring truth of Christianity that the believers participate in while in the mundane sphere. It is something that endures, unlike the person of Jesus or the physical things associated with him.

The idea of the Holy Spirit as the spirit of God in the Christian community focuses on the conscious awareness of the believers. This Hegel interprets to mean that God is the self-consciousness of the individuals, that is, he is a thought in their minds. This idea borders on heresy since it might be taken to imply that God is just a product of the human mind. But since Hegel is an idealist, who believes that ideas are what is most real, this objection does not hit the mark. To say that the truths of geometry are ideas in the human mind is not to say that they are not real and true. So also, according to Hegel the idea of the Christian God is the true one, and the self-conscious reason of each individual is witness to this.

We have traced the long story that began with the sense of anxiety and the sense of being alienated from oneself. This produced a deeply felt need for reconciliation, which comes with the story of Christ as overcoming nature. This story parallels the development of human beings from infancy to adulthood. Humans are born as objects of nature with drives and desires and very little by way of reason. However, over time the rational faculty becomes developed, and they are able to overcome their natural drives. Only after this has happened can they be said to be truly free and to follow the dictates of reason and not their natural side. With this the reconciliation has occurred as humans realize that they are primarily spirit. With this development, each person is able to traverse individually the story

of Christ and overcome nature.³⁵ People are thus aware of this reconciliation in the concrete context of their own lives. In the story of Christ they can recognize their own story. This awareness is what is shared by everyone in the Christian community. People realize that reconciliation is not only possible, but, indeed, it has already taken place. Spirit has conquered over nature, and humans have managed to develop their reason and be free. Even though every human being must go through this process individually, in adults it is a process that has already been achieved.³⁶

This is of course not to say that we no longer have a natural side. We still have bodies and drives, but the point is that this is no longer what is essential or defining for us. Hegel explains:

There is still the external and deficient side of humanity: we commit errors; we can exist in a way that is not appropriate to this inward, substantial essentiality, this substantial, essential inwardness. The difficulty is removed by the fact that God looks into the heart and sees what is substantial, so that externality—otherness, finitude, and imperfection in general, or however else it may be defined—does no damage to the absolute unity; finitude is reduced to an inessential status, and is known as inessential.³⁷

The true essence of the human has now become something rational. It is useful to place this insight into Hegel's long narrative of the development of human beings from nature. Human beings began as essentially animals with the natural side being dominant. It took thousands of years of prehistory to overcome this. Only at the beginning of historical times does the natural side start to be subjugated to the inward rational side. The birth of Christianity in the early Roman Empire demonstrates the victory over the natural.

The awareness of this in the Christian community is what it means to participate in the Kingdom of God.³⁸ This kingdom is not in some other place and time, but it exists in the present in the minds of the individuals in the community. God encourages individuals to further cultivate and develop their rational side, that is, their spirit, in contrast to the natural side, which has been overcome. While Zoroastrianism still conceives of the struggle between good and evil to be ongoing, the view of Christianity is that the outcome has already been achieved and that good, that is, rationality or spirit, has defeated evil or nature: 'Thus evil is known as something that has been overcome in and for itself, having no power of

³⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 329; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 252.

³⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 329; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 252.

³⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 332; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 255.

³⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 331; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 254. See Dale M. Schlitt, 'Hegel on the Kingdom of God,' *Église et Théologie*, vol. 19, 1988, pp. 33–68.

its own... The battle is now over, and the consciousness arises that there is no longer a struggle, as in the Parsee religion.³⁹

Hegel believes that the church is the vehicle that facilitates the awareness of spirit: it is 'the institution whereby subjects come to the truth, appropriate the truth to themselves, so that the Holy Spirit becomes real, actual, and present within them and has its abode in them.'⁴⁰ However, the doctrines of the church are not immediately given to people. Hegel thus emphasizes the importance of religious instruction: 'The church is essentially a teaching church.'⁴¹ When young people are taught religious doctrine, they must first take this on authority.⁴² It is something that comes from the outside. But this does not disqualify it as the truth. In the course of time, as children grow and develop their rationality, they can give their consent to these doctrines when they see that they are in harmony with their own inward reason. This is no different from the way in which we come to accept certain customs and traditions from our ancestors. Customs come to us from the outside. We were not responsible for making them. But later we can choose to follow them or not. Thus the church does not demand a blind obedience. Instead, it makes an appeal to the rationality of each individual.

This is the key to reconciliation. When individuals see their own rational will reflected in the customs, laws, and values of the external world they feel at home in the world.⁴³ The church represents the realization of reconciliation in the world.⁴⁴ Now humans can realize their freedom in the world. There is a realization that the individual has an irreducible 'infinite value'.⁴⁵ This awareness and its realization are both connected to a common sense of identity of the members of the church.

6.6 The Trinity

One of the key dogmas that Hegel intends to restore is that of the Trinity.⁴⁶ He believes that this notion is one of the defining features of the Christian conception

³⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 337; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 259–60.

⁴⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 333; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 256.

⁴¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 334; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 257.

⁴² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 335; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 258.

⁴³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 340; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 262.

⁴⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 339; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 262.

⁴⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 340; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 262.

⁴⁶ See Paolo Diego Bubbio, *God and the Self in Hegel: Beyond Subjectivism*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2017, pp. 105–24. William Desmond, *Hegel's God: A Counterfeit Double?*, pp. 103–42. Peter C. Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 127–40. Herbert Huber, *Idealismus und Trinität, Pantheon und Götterdämmerung. Grundlagen und Grundzüge der Lehre von Gott nach dem Manuskript Hegels zur Religionsphilosophie*, Weinheim: Acta humaniora 1984. Anselm Min, 'The Trinity and the Incarnation: Hegel and Classical Approaches,' *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 66, 1986, pp. 173–93. O'Regan, *The*

of God that separates it fundamentally from other religions.⁴⁷ He takes the demonstration of this to be so central to his undertaking that he organizes his own analysis in terms of the three members of the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸ God is not something static but rather a dynamic development and process.⁴⁹

The key to understanding the importance and philosophical meaning of the Trinity is found in Hegel's doctrine of the Concept or Notion (*Begriff*). The problem of universals has been the perennial issue in the history of philosophy ever since Plato. The question concerns how our perceptions about individual things in the world match up to our thoughts. The key feature of perception is particularity since every individual object that we perceive with our senses is unique. By contrast, the characteristic of thought and language is universality. Truth, beauty, and justice are not particular entities that we perceive in the world but instead are general thoughts. The philosophical problem arises from the interface between the particulars of perception and the universals of thought. We constantly make judgements, claiming that a particular statement is true or a particular action is just, and in these statements we connect these particulars with the universal conceptions of truth and justice. Even though formulating judgements is something that we routinely do, it is not easy to explain how this is actually possible. Where do the universal ideas in our mind come from? How are we able to see a particular thing and categorize it under a universal?

Hegel's dialectical approach to this problem is to claim that previous philosophers have tended to take a one-sided view, giving primacy to the universal and downplaying the particular or vice versa. Idealists like Plato claim that knowledge comes from the universals which are what is truly real and enduring. By contrast, empiricist realists tend to claim that our perceptions of the world are what is primary and the universals are formed simply by the habit of abstracting from many individual cases. By contrast, Hegel claims that the universal and the particular are equally primary and belong to both the nature of human thought and indeed the world. Thought itself, he claims, is not a static judgement, but rather a process that moves from universal to particular and to their unity, when a particular is placed under a universal. The triadic movement is what Hegel calls the 'Concept' or the 'Notion'.⁵⁰ This is also represented in the movement of the syllogism, which begins with a universal claim (the major premise), and then

Heterodox Hegel, passim. Erik Schmidt, 'Hegel und die kirchliche Trinitätslehre,' *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, vol. 24, 1982, pp. 241–60. Jörg Splett, *Die Trinitätslehre G. W. F. Hegels*, Munich: Alber 1965.

⁴⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 126–7; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 43.

⁴⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 271–4; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 196–9.

⁴⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 275–6; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 201: 'the eternal idea is expressed in terms of the holy Trinity: it is God himself, eternally triune. Spirit is this process movement, life.' *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 331; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 254: 'this truth is what God is: he is the triune God; he is life, this process of himself within himself, the determining of himself within himself.'

⁵⁰ Hegel, *EL*, § 163; *Jub.*, vol. 8, pp. 358–61.

contains a particular claim (the minor premise), which are then combined in the conclusion.

Hegel organized his lectures in general in accordance with this scheme. The universal aspect or 'The Concept of Religion' represents the major premise in the syllogism, which makes a universal claim. The particular aspect or 'Determinate Religion' represents the minor premise, which makes particular claims about particular religions. Finally, the major premise and the minor premise are united in the conclusion, 'The Absolute Religion', which brings a particular religion, Christianity, under the universal concept of religion. Hegel organizes his account in this way since he believes that this is the true method of scientific enquiry: 'This is always the pattern in scientific knowledge: first the concept; then the particularity of the concept—reality, objectivity; and finally the stage in which the original concept is an object to itself, is for itself, becomes objective to itself, is related to itself.'⁵¹

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity mirrors the philosophical doctrine of the Concept. The Father represents the abstract universal, the object of thought but not perception. The Son is a concrete, particular who appears in the real world in the realm of perception. Finally, the Holy Spirit is the unity of the two, the particular that returns to the universal:

The Absolute Spirit exhibits itself (α) as eternal content, abiding self-centered, even in its manifestation; (β) as distinction of the eternal essence from its manifestation, which by this difference becomes the phenomenal world into which the content enters; (γ) as infinite return, and reconciliation with the eternal being, of the world it gave away—the withdrawal of the eternal from the phenomenal into the unity of its fullness.⁵²

Here it is possible to see the importance of the idea of both revelation and reconciliation for Hegel. These well-known religious doctrines capture a deep philosophical truth.

With the doctrine of the Trinity Hegel is able to distinguish Christianity clearly from the other world religions. He believes that the religions of nature are overly focused on the empirical particulars since they conceive of natural forces in the realm of perception as divinities. Greek and Roman polytheism falls victim to this even though these forces are anthropomorphized. By contrast, Judaism and Islam conceive of God simply as the abstract universal, without any concrete aspect. For Hegel, these religions fail to see the true necessary relation between the universal and the particular.

⁵¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 249; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 177.

⁵² Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, § 566; *Jub.*, vol. 10, p. 455. See *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 186; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 120. *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 271–4; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 196–9.

The Christian God is neither just a mere idea nor a concrete physical entity. Instead, the Christian conception of the divine is a developmental process. It is the very movement from universal to particular and to their unity. There is an original unity, a separation or division and then a higher unity, which combines the divided parts. Self-consciousness or spirit involves a division or separation, and thus the Christian God, qua spirit, must also display this feature.⁵³

This idea also illuminates Hegel's concept of spirit, which he claims also involves a movement. We begin with our own self-conception, but then when we see another person, we, so to speak, go out of ourselves and see ourselves through the eyes of the other. Then finally we return to ourselves with this new perspective which we try to bring into harmony with our own self-image. This is of course Hegel's famous doctrine of recognition, whereby the other is necessary for determining who we are as individuals. In Hegel's language, this is the very nature of spirit or self-consciousness:

But what is spirit? It is the one immutably homogeneous infinite—pure identity—which in its second phase separates itself from itself and makes this second aspect its own polar opposite, viz. as existence for and in self as contrasted with the universal. But this separation is annulled by the fact that atomistic subjectivity, as simple relation to itself [as occupied with self alone] is itself the universal, the identical with self. . . . [Spirit] is recognized as *Triune*: the “Father” and the “Son” and that duality which essentially characterizes it as “Spirit.”⁵⁴

The natural religions fail to see the divine as spirit since they lack this conception of the movement of thought.

6.7 Christianity and Philosophical Knowing

At the very end of his lectures Hegel returns to the question of the relation of religion, specifically Christianity, to philosophy.⁵⁵ The Christian account of the movement from the abstract God in the beyond to the concrete God with the Incarnation and finally to the resurrected God in the Holy Spirit is religion's way of expressing the speculative truth of the Concept. The goal of philosophy is, in part, to demonstrate the truth and rationality of religion and, specifically, Christianity. Hegel's central claim is that philosophy and religion express the

⁵³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 250; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 178.

⁵⁴ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 323–4; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 415–16. See also *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 319; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 410: ‘God is thus recognized as *Spirit*, only when known as the *Triune*.’

⁵⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 161–2; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 96–7; *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 246–7; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 174–6. *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 347; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 269–70.

same truth or the same content but in different ways.⁵⁶ Philosophical knowing is thus in a sense the same as religious knowing.⁵⁷ Speculative philosophy attempts to demonstrate the necessity of the Concept in the different spheres of thought. In so doing, it shows that certain phenomena originally thought to be separate and distinct are in fact necessarily related and constitute a single conceptual unit. In this way philosophy overcomes various forms of dualism that are stuck at subordinate levels of knowing. The speculative history of the forms of religions that Hegel has traced performs a similar function. It shows the conception of the divine developing in such a way as to overcome the dualism of human and divine, and thus the alienation that humans feel from the divine. This is just one of many forms of dualism that speculative philosophy attempts to sublimate.

Despite these similarities, there is also a key difference in the way in which religious thinking and philosophical thinking understand their objects. Religious thinking sees the story of the Incarnation and the Resurrection as contingent, just as it saw the Fall as an unfortunate accident. These events might or might not have happened. By contrast, speculative philosophical thinking discerns the necessity of this development since it embodies the development of the Concept. The movement from universal to particular and then to their unity in an individual is a necessary movement of thought. It is no mere accident or chance, but a necessary ontological movement found in all spheres of human thought. As was seen above, the Christian Trinity thus mirrors the three parts of the speculative Concept. But the Christian believer fails to see the necessary conceptual structure that lies at bottom in the Trinity. This is what constitutes the difference between religious and philosophical thinking. The speculative philosopher can see the Concept as Concept, that is, in its pure conceptual form, whereas the religious thinker sees it only in its specific religious forms. The externalization of the universal in the particular is grasped in anthropomorphic terms as the birth of the Son of God in the world. Instead of speaking of the universal and the particular, the religious believer speaks of the Father and the Son.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 479; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 602: 'Spirit itself as a whole, and the self-differentiated moments within it, fall within the sphere of picture-thinking and in the form of objectivity. The content of this picture-thinking is Absolute Spirit.' *EL*, § 1; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 41: 'The objects of philosophy, it is true, are upon the whole the same as those of religion.' *PR*, § 270, Remark; *Jub.*, vol. 7, pp. 348–66.

⁵⁷ See 'Comparison of Philosophy and Religion with Regard to their Object,' *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 151–4; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 62–5. See Stephen Rucker, *Hegel's Rational Religion: The Validity of Hegel's Argument for the Identity in Content of Absolute Religion and Absolute Philosophy*, Madison and Teaneck: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, London: Associated University Presses 1995. Edward Black, 'Religion and Philosophy in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion,' *The Monist*, vol. 60, no. 2, 1977, pp. 198–212. Laurence Dickey, 'Hegel on Religion and Philosophy,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Frederick C. Beiser, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993, pp. 301–47. Quentin Lauer, 'Hegel on the Identity of Content in Religion and Philosophy,' in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. by Darrel E. Christensen, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1970, pp. 261–78. O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 333–70.

In Hegel's hierarchy of knowing, religious thinking thus represents the penultimate form of thought, second only to philosophy. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he explains as follows that religion is still inadequate in its grasp of the truth:

This form is not yet Spirit's self-consciousness that has advanced to its Concept *qua* Concept: the mediation is still incomplete. This combination of being and thought is, therefore, defective in that . . . the *content* is the true content, but all its moments, when placed in the medium of picture-thinking, have the character of being uncomprehended [in terms of the Concept], of appearing as completely independent sides which are externally connected with each other.⁵⁸

This is Hegel's way of saying that the different conceptions of the divine are considered separate and in their essence unrelated. Their relation is only accidental. Picture-thinking is thus limited and falls short of being a completely adequate and satisfying form of knowing.⁵⁹ It requires philosophy to discern the conceptual truth in religion and thus to distinguish it from the accidental.

Since Hegel believes that religion ultimately finds its truth and justification in philosophy, he is often reproached for failing to appreciate the value of religious feeling. He is said to be dismissive of anything that cannot fit into the rational content of his system. Hegel tries to anticipate this objection here. He openly acknowledges that religious believers have profound feelings and emotions that are important to them. But he points out that these feelings cannot be used to justify anything. They cannot prove something for reason and thought. He claims that true philosophical thought can capture the content of what is felt and express it in a way that is acceptable for reason. So in this sense it cannot be said that philosophy dismisses or excludes the realm of feeling; rather, feeling is in fact included in philosophy and even has its content justified by it.

Hegel refers to philosophy as the witness of spirit since it relies on conceptual thinking, which is governed by necessity: 'The witness of spirit in its highest form is that of philosophy, according to which the concept develops the truth purely as such from itself without presuppositions. As it develops, it cognizes—in and through its development it has insight into—the necessity of the truth.'⁶⁰ His use of religious language to describe the work of philosophy clearly indicates his view that philosophy and religion are closely intertwined. He acknowledges that not

⁵⁸ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 463; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 581–2. Translation slightly modified. See also *PhS*, pp. 465–6; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 585–6. *PhS*, pp. 477–8; *Jub.*, vol. 2, pp. 599–601.

⁵⁹ Hegel, *PhS*, p. 412; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 520: 'So far as Spirit in religion *pictures* itself to itself, it is indeed consciousness, and the reality enclosed within religion is the shape and the guise of its picture-thinking. But, in this picture-thinking, reality does not receive its perfect due, viz. to be not merely a guise but an independent free existence; and conversely, because it lacks perfection within itself it is a *specific* shape which does not attain to what it ought to show forth, viz. Spirit that is conscious of itself.'

⁶⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 256; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 183.

everyone is able to engage in conceptual knowing and that there are different approaches to religion. His point is merely that the deeper truth and meaning can only be found in philosophy. Only with appeal to this can Christianity be saved from its Enlightenment critics.

The Enlightenment thinkers conceive of the finite and the infinite to be radically different and separate from one another.⁶¹ They place the infinite in the transcendent sphere and focus their attention on the empirical finite sphere. Hegel claims that this is a mistake. The finite and the infinite are necessarily related. The infinite can appear in the finite, or rather the infinite contains the finite in itself. Speculative thinking overcomes the simple understanding of the Enlightenment thinkers and sees the true dialectical relations connecting these concepts with one another.

6.8 The Rise of Protestantism

In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* Hegel does not go on to trace the development of Christianity historically but instead concentrates on the conceptual analysis of the key dogmas discussed above. However, he does explore some elements of this development in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*. His account there is useful since it continues the story he wants to tell about the nature of the Christian religion as one of freedom. Hegel regards the Protestant Reformation as one of the most significant movements in modern history since it plays a crucial role in the development of freedom by shifting the focus of truth and authority from the external and established power of the Church to the conscience of the single individual.

In a sense this account differs from the ones given in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in that Protestantism does not represent a new religion as such but rather a development within the Christian religion. Nonetheless this is still entirely continuous with the development of the concept of the divine and human freedom that we have been tracing. Like the development of the other religions, the rise of Protestantism corresponds to a new historical or cultural awareness of the development of spirit and human subjectivity.

In his account Hegel's criticism of Catholicism comes out quite clearly.⁶² He begins by claiming that the corruption of the Church was not just an unfortunate historical accident that might or might not have happened. It was not caused by specific morally depraved individuals who just happened to occupy important positions in the Church. Instead, the corruption ran deeper than this:

⁶¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 263; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 189.

⁶² See Peter Jonkers, 'Eine ungeistige Religion. Hegel über den Katholizismus,' *Hegel-Jahrbuch*, vol. 12, 2010, pp. 400–5.

The Reformation resulted from the *corruption of the Church*. That corruption was not an accidental phenomenon; it was not the mere *abuse* of power and dominion. A corrupt state of things is very frequently represented as an "abuse"; it is taken for granted that the foundation was good—the system, the institution itself faultless—but that the passion, the subjective interest, in short the arbitrary volition of men has made use of that which in itself was good to further its own selfish end, and that all that is required to be done is to remove these adventitious elements.⁶³

On Hegel's view, the corruption of the Church was necessary and natural given its mistaken approach to religion. The problems that led to the Reformation were not chance anomalies in an otherwise sound system. Rather, they were fundamental and endemic to that system.

Hegel identifies the corrupt element of the Church in its conception of the divine: 'The corruption of the Church was a native growth; the principle of that corruption is to be looked for in the fact that the specific and definite embodiment of the Deity which it recognizes, is sensuous—that the external in a coarse material form, is enshrined in its inmost being.'⁶⁴ We have seen above that Hegel interprets the dogma of the Trinity in terms of movement from the universal to the particular and then their unity. He objects to conceptions of the divine which remain focused only on the universal or only on the particular since they fail to see the full development of the concept. The focus on the particular does not recognize the fleeting nature of particularity, which must be grounded in something eternal.

From a historical point of view, the focus on the sensuous is, according to Hegel, one that is characteristic of older stages of religion but is in no way in keeping with the modern world. The modern principle recognizes the sensuous for what it is and is no longer satisfied with it on its own. It requires a higher principle beyond the merely sensuous. The Church therefore 'occupies a *position of inferiority to the world-spirit*; the latter has already transcended it, for it has become capable of recognizing the sensuous as sensuous, the merely outward as merely outward; it has learned to occupy itself with the finite in a finite way, and in this very activity to maintain an independent and confident position as a valid and rightful subjectivity.'⁶⁵ Given the disconnect between the principle of the Church and the modern spirit, the conflict was inevitable.

Hegel lists a litany of abuses that he believes the Church was guilty of, all of which resulted in some way from the mistaken conception of the divine that was bound to the sensuous element. He explains:

⁶³ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 412; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 519.

⁶⁴ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 412–13; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 520.

⁶⁵ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 413; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 520.

The ecclesiastical piety of the period displays the very essence of superstition—the fettering of the mind to a sensuous object, a mere thing—in the most various forms: a slavish deference to *authority*; for spirit, having renounced its proper nature in its most essential quality, has lost its freedom, and is held in adamant-bondage to what is alien to itself; a credulity of the most absurd and childish character in regard to *miracles*, for the divine is supposed to manifest itself in a perfectly disconnected and limited way, for purely finite and particular purposes; lastly, lust of power, riotous debauchery, all the forms of barbarous and vulgar corruption, hypocrisy and deception—all this manifests itself in the Church; for in fact the sensuous in it is not subjugated and trained by the understanding; it has become free, but only in a rough and barbarous way.⁶⁶

Thus authority, miracles, and corruption are all the result of fixing the conception of the divine on the sensuous and not on the higher faculties of the mind. All of these are antithetical to human rationality and inwardness, which have taken so long to develop in history.

Hegel points out that the contradiction and hypocrisy in the Church's behaviour become evident when it engages in the sensual in the most base manner but at the same time extols as a virtue the denial of the senses and a renunciation of mundane pleasures. While the leaders of the Church give free reign to their desires, the monks and common believers are instilled with a sense of guilt and sinfulness for the smallest infractions. Hegel further refers to the purchasing of indulgences:

The Church whose office it is to save souls from perdition, makes this salvation itself a mere external appliance, and is now degraded so far as to perform this office in a merely external fashion. The *remission of sins*—the highest satisfaction which the soul craves, the certainty of its peace with God, that which concerns man's deepest and inmost nature—is offered to man in the most grossly superficial and trivial fashion—to be purchased for mere money; while the object of this sale is to procure means for dissolute excess.⁶⁷

The Church should attend to the inward nature of sin and its absolution, but instead this is wholly neglected when the matter is turned into a mere financial transaction since this is wholly devoid of any inward element.

Hegel then turns to the basic principles of Luther's thought which, to his mind, focused on the correct things with regard to religiosity.⁶⁸ From his introduction of

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 413–14; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 520–1.

⁶⁷ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 414; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 521.

⁶⁸ See Ulrich Asendorf, *Luther und Hegel. Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung einer neuen systematischen Theologie*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag 1982. G. R. Mure, 'Hegel, Luther, and the

this topic, it is clear that he regards Luther as somehow typifying the Germanic spirit with which history ends. Thus his praise of Luther is at the same time a more general encomium of the Germanic spirit. He explains somewhat poetically:

The time-honored and cherished *sincerity of the German people* is destined to effect this revolution out of the honest truth and simplicity of its heart. While the rest of the world are urging their way to India, to America—straining every nerve to gain wealth and to acquire secular dominion which shall encompass the globe, and on which the sun shall never set—we find a simple *monk* looking for that specific embodiment of the Deity which Christendom had formerly sought in an earthly sepulcher of stone, rather in the deeper abyss of the absolute ideality of all that is sensuous and external—in the spirit and the heart—the heart, which, wounded unspeakably by the offer of the most trivial and superficial appliances to satisfy the cravings of that which is inmost and deepest, now detects the perversion of the absolute relation of truth in its minutest features, and pursues it to annihilation.⁶⁹

Here one can see a thinly veiled criticism of what Hegel regards as the soulless nature of the British Empire and the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in the New World. These countries were obsessive in their pursuit of their mercantile and political interests at the expense of the spiritual. In contrast, Luther (and with him the Germanic people) is raised up on a pedestal for being indifferent to such mundane things that drive others.

Luther, according to Hegel, focuses on the inward nature of faith and not an outward object of sense: 'Luther's simple doctrine is that the specific embodiment of the Deity—infinite subjectivity, that is true spirituality, Christ—is in no way present and actual in an outward form, but as essentially spiritual is obtained only in being reconciled to God—in *faith and spiritual enjoyment*.'⁷⁰ As Hegel sketched in his account of the different dogmas, the true meaning of Christ's mission is one of thought and not the senses. Reconciliation with God in the Holy Spirit is an idea and not an object of sense. Luther's basic view results in the change of a series of different views of the Church which were all related to the approach to Christianity by means of the senses, not least of all the superstition that the Church indulges. Superstition comes from a focus on the sphere of empirical perception, which people mistakenly take to be the central issue. Hegel explains the mistaken conception of faith based on the senses:

Owl of Minerva,' *Philosophy*, vol. 41, 1966, pp. 127–39. Philip M. Merklinger, *Philosophy, Theology, and Hegel's Berlin Philosophy of Religion, 1821–1827*, pp. 90–111. O'Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel*, pp. 209–34.

⁶⁹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 414–15; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 521–2.

⁷⁰ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 415; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 522.

Faith is by no means a bare assurance respecting mere finite things—an assurance which belongs only to limited mind—as, for example, the belief that such or such a person existed and said this or that; or that the Children of Israel passed dry-shod through the Red Sea—or that the trumpets before the walls of Jericho produced as powerful an impression as our cannons; for even if nothing of all this had been related to us, our knowledge of God would not be the less complete. In fact it is not a belief in something that is absent, past and gone, but the subjective assurance of the eternal, of absolute truth, the truth of God.⁷¹

This might be taken as an allusion to the discussions initiated by Lessing in connection with the publication of the Reimarus fragments. As we saw, Reimarus tried to argue against the accounts of the miracles in the scriptures, including the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea. This evoked the consternation of the clergy who were at pains to refute him. Following Lessing, Hegel claims that the focus of this discussion is misplaced since nothing hangs on the veracity of these miracles. For Hegel, the true focus should not be on these objects of sense but rather on the Holy Spirit, which is never perceived directly by the senses. Luther 'maintained that the Spirit of Christ really fills the human heart—that Christ therefore is not to be regarded as merely a historical person, but that man sustains *an immediate relation to him in Spirit*.'⁷² This is of course not to say that the existence of Christ was irrelevant since, as we have seen above, Hegel takes this to be an important aspect in the developmental process of the divine. But the key is that this is only a passing moment. By contrast, the enduring aspect is that of the spirit of Christ in the Christian community.

The issue of authority is also important to Hegel given his thesis about the development of human freedom in history and in the religions of the world. The great historical advance with the Reformation is that it eliminates the hierarchy of the Church and places faith and truth in the hands of the individual believers:

While, then, the individual knows that he is filled with the divine spirit, all the relations that sprung from that vitiating element of externality which we examined above, are *ipso facto* abrogated: there is no longer a distinction between priests and laymen; we no longer find one class in possession of the substance of the truth, as of the spiritual and temporal treasures of the Church; but the heart—the emotional part of man's spiritual nature—is recognized as that which can and ought to come into possession of the truth; and this subjectivity is the common

⁷¹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 415; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 522–3. (Translation slightly modified.)

⁷² Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 416; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 523.

property of all mankind. Each has to accomplish the work of reconciliation in his own soul.⁷³

This principle of subjectivity makes the Reformation a profoundly modern movement. Luther's idea of the universal priesthood of all believers deprives the clergy of their traditional authority and privileged relation to religious truth. The individual is no longer dependent on some external authority, such as the Church, the Pope, or the local priest for the truth. Now each individual can choose to believe based on the inclinations of his or her own conscience. There is thus a move from the external sphere to the internal. Luther's doctrine of salvation based on faith in contrast to works undermined the practice of selling indulgences. The salvation of each individual was a matter of their own faith and not their actions in the world. For Luther, the objective doctrine goes hand-in-hand with the subjective appropriation, and both aspects are given their due: 'In the Lutheran Church the subjective feeling and the conviction of the individual is regarded as equally necessary with the objective side of truth.'⁷⁴ Even though there is a fixed doctrine, which is something external, the assent of the individual is also necessary. The believer is not forced or coerced to believe by some higher authority. The key point here is Luther's emphasis on the Bible as the true authority in contrast to that of the Church. Now individuals could decide about matters of belief for themselves by reading the Bible and coming to their own conclusions about it. It was not dictated to them what they should believe, and they did not need the authority of the Church to interpret the sacred texts for them.⁷⁵

Since the faith of the believer, for Luther, comes from the believer's own conscience and reason, this, according to Hegel, leads to the modern conception of subjective freedom, whereby the individual has the right to play a role in his or her own self-determination and in the determination of the truth: 'This is the essence of the Reformation: man is in his very nature destined to be free.'⁷⁶ The Reformation recognized the importance of the individual in questions of religious faith, and this had the effect of elevating the principle of subjective freedom also in other spheres. The period since the Reformation has seen this principle develop even further.

Hegel's account of Lutheranism sheds light on his view that Christianity alone is the religion of freedom. It celebrates the inward subjective side of the individual. It regards conscience as something irreducible. The Protestant Reformation thus represents an important chapter in the narrative that Hegel wants to tell about the development of subjective freedom. The basic principle of subjective freedom has

⁷³ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 416; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 523.

⁷⁴ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 416; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 524.

⁷⁵ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 417–18; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 525.

⁷⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 417; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 524.

subsequently been transferred from its origin in the religious context to secular culture, where it has been further developed. This has led to modern individuals loosening ties with any number of different institutions such as the family, the guild, the community, and the state. Now the focus is almost entirely on the individual at the expense of these wider institutions. Hegel is right in pointing out the often neglected role of religion in this development, with which we are all familiar in the modern world.

The Omission of Islam

One of the great mysteries about Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* is why he does not dedicate a special analysis to Islam in the same way that he does to the other religions. At the end of his lectures, he sketches only very briefly the continued development of the concept of religion,¹ and here he provides a short discussion of Islam. This religion is also mentioned in his account of Judaism,² with which it, in Hegel's view, has certain features in common. It is certainly reasonable to think that, as a major world religion, Islam would be worthy of a more detailed treatment, especially when one considers its historical importance vis-à-vis some of the less known religions that he does treat, such as Zoroastrianism or the ancient Chinese religion.

While Hegel only mentions Islam in a few scattered passages in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he does in fact treat different aspects of this religion in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*³ and his *Lectures on Aesthetics*,⁴ and there are even scattered mentions of it in the *Encyclopedia*.⁵ But the most extensive treatment comes in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*.⁶ Despite his many references to and brief treatments of Islam, this has traditionally been a neglected topic in the secondary literature.⁷ However, the profound significance of this topic

¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 242–44; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 172–73.

² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 156; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 62. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 158; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 64. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 438; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 337. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 742; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 628.

³ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 26–35; *Jub.*, vol. 19, pp. 121–31.

⁴ Instead of a single continuous treatment of Arabic art, Hegel gives numerous sporadic remarks about it throughout his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. See especially *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, pp. 1096–98; *Jub.*, vol. 14, pp. 401–403. *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, pp. 368–71; *Jub.*, vol. 12, pp. 489–92. Other references can be readily located with the help of Hermann Glockner's *Hegel-Lexikon*, vols 25–26 of *Sämtliche Werke. Jubiläumsausgabe* (ed. by Hermann Glockner, Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag 1928–41) or the index to the English translation, *Hegel's Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, vols 1–2 (trans. by T.M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1975, 1998).

⁵ Hegel, *EL*, § 112, Addition, p. 177; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 265. *EL*, § 151, Addition, p. 226; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 340. *Phil. of Mind*, § 393, Addition, p. 44; *Jub.*, vol. 10, p. 76. *Phil. of Mind*, § 573, pp. 308–13; *Jub.*, vol. 10, p. 466–74.

⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 355–60; *Jub.*, vol. 11, pp. 453–59.

⁷ See Ian Almond, 'Hegel and the Disappearance of Islam,' in his *History of Islam in German Thought from Leibniz to Nietzsche*, New York: Routledge 2010, pp. 108–34. Soegeng Hardiyanto, *Zwischen Phantasie und Wirklichkeit. Der Islam im Spiegel des deutschen Denkens im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang 1992, pp. 130–43. Ernst Schulin, 'Der Mohammedanismus' in his *Die weltgeschichtliche Erfassung des Orients bei Hegel und Ranke*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1958, pp. 115–24. Hans Joachim Schoeps, 'Die außerschristlichen Religion bei Hegel,' *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1955, pp. 1–33, see pp. 32–34. Michel Hulin, 'L'Islam,' in his *Hegel et l'orient, suivi de la traduction annotée d'un essai*

for current discussions about religion and culture should be obvious and has been noted by recent studies.⁸

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, specifically in his account of the Middle Ages, Hegel devotes a short section to the rise of Islam as a religion and the Arab world as an important political power. While his treatment of Islam here might seem homogeneous or even one-sided, in fact under this rubric he examines at least three distinct historical peoples: the Turks, the Persians, and the Arabs. This fact explains what some commentators have regarded as inconsistencies in his analyses.⁹ Since he is more favourably disposed towards the Turks and the Persians than the Arabs, his accounts of the former seem more positive than those of the latter.¹⁰

What is surprising for some readers is the partly sympathetic treatment that he gives of Islam. In the context of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, it is obvious and reasonable to expect that religion will continue to develop beyond the account of early Christianity that was provided in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Islam represents a part of the story that Hegel wants to tell about the subsequent development of religion and culture. As has been seen, he believes that the historical movement of the different world religions represents a developmental process, with more adequate conceptions of the divine replacing less adequate ones. Given this internal logic of his lectures, it is not counterintuitive or problematic that he in some ways gives Islam favourable treatment since it does appear chronologically after Christianity. Indeed, one might even expect him to describe it as a higher form of religion due to the place that it occupies in the historical development.

While Hegel does not go this far, he nonetheless clearly has great respect for Arabic culture at its high point. He states that the Arabs in the Middle Ages

de Hegel sur la Bhagavad-Gita, Paris: J. Vrin 1979, pp. 135–37. Ivan Kalmar, 'The Sublime is not Enough: The Hard Orientalism of G. W. F. Hegel,' in his *Early Orientalism: Imagined Islam and the Notion of Sublime Power*, New York: Routledge 2012, pp. 76–87. Lorella Ventura, 'The Abstract God and the Role of the Finite: Hegel's View of the Islamic Absolute,' *Jahrbuch für Hegelforschung*, vols 15–17, 2014, pp. 117–34. Sai Bhatawadekar, 'Islam in Hegel's Triadic Philosophy of Religion,' *Journal of World History*, vol. 25, nos 2–3, 2014, pp. 397–24.

⁸ See Kevin Thompson, 'Hegel, the Political and the Theological: The Question of Islam,' in *Hegel on Religion and Politics*, ed. by Angelica Nuzzo, Albany: State University of New York Press 2013, pp. 99–118. Will Dudley, 'The Active Fanaticism of Political and Religious Life: Hegel on Terror and Islam,' in *Hegel on Religion and Politics*, ed. by Angelica Nuzzo, pp. 119–31. R.D. Winfield, *Modernity, Religion, and the War on Terror*, Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate 2007, p. 102. Mohammad R. Salama, 'How Did Islam Make It into Hegel's Philosophy of World History,' in his *Islam, Orientalism and Intellectual History: Modernity and the Politics of Exclusion since Ibn Khaldun*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris 2011, pp. 103–22; especially, pp. 116–22. Jean-Joseph Goux, 'Untimely Islam: September 11 and the Philosophies of History,' *SubStance*, issue 115, vol. 37, no 1, 2008, pp. 52–71.

⁹ This is particularly underscored in Ian Almond's account. See his *History of Islam in German Thought from Leibniz to Nietzsche*, pp. 108–34.

¹⁰ See Almond, *History of Islam in German Thought from Leibniz to Nietzsche*, p. 117: 'Hegel's writings may well have been largely Turk-free, but the specter of an established, sophisticated and distinctly unbarbaric Muslim culture next door to Europe would forever cause problems for the Christian and European bias of his teleology.'

quickly passed through the various stages of development and very soon 'advanced in culture much farther than the West'.¹¹ In his *Lectures on Aesthetics*, for example, he speaks highly of Arabic poetry, which he admires for its ability to focus on its object with a single-minded passion.¹² With regard to philosophy, he regards Arabic thinking, which was profoundly shaped by the religious investments of Islam, as following a continuous line that began in the Greek world.¹³ Although Hegel claims that Arabic philosophy does not represent its own independent stage in the history of philosophy and did not develop its own particular principle,¹⁴ he does nonetheless have laudatory words for some parts of it: 'in Mohammedanism . . . philosophy, along with all the other arts and sciences, flourished to an extraordinary degree.'¹⁵

With regard to its historical origins, Hegel understands the rise of Islam as the natural result of the rise of its opposite principle. According to his dialectic of opposites, when one principle appears, its opposite necessarily follows. In the wake of the fall of the Roman Empire, the West was breaking up into a number of small units and contingent alliances. Daily affairs were regulated in a myriad of accidents with no stronger, more enduring institutions. Its principle was that of particularity. Hegel explains that one saw the West 'bringing all social relations under the form of particularity—with dull and narrow intelligence splitting that which in its nature is generic and normal, into a multitude of chance contingencies; rendering that which ought to be simple principle and law, a tangled web of convention.'¹⁶ The Arab world arose as a world-historical force in contrast to what appeared to be the declining state of Europe:

In the West the Germanic tribes had obtained possession of what had hitherto formed a section of the Roman Empire, and their conquests were attaining to shape and solidity, when another religion dawned in the East, namely the Mohammedan. The East purified itself of all that was individual and definite, while the West descended into the depths and actual presence of spirit.¹⁷

The derogatory mention of the Germanic tribes is particularly significant here since Hegel is often reproached for a latent pro-Germanic nationalism in both his political philosophy and his philosophy of history.

¹¹ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 27; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 121.

¹² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, pp. 1096–7; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 401.

¹³ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 29; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 124: 'In the Arabic philosophy, which shows a free, brilliant and profound power of imagination, philosophy and the sciences took the same bent that they had taken earlier among the Greeks.'

¹⁴ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, pp. 29–30; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 125.

¹⁵ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 26; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 121.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 355; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 453.

¹⁷ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 27; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 121.

In his portrayal of this historical development, Hegel uses dramatic terms, referring to the rise of Islam as ‘the *revolution of the East*’.¹⁸ This was a movement that ‘destroyed all particularity and dependence, and perfectly cleared up and purified the soul and disposition; making the abstract One the absolute object of attention and devotion, and to the same extent, pure subjective consciousness—knowledge of this One alone—the only aim of reality; making the unconditioned the condition of existence.’¹⁹ In short, Islam represents the principle of universality arising as the opposing principle to the chaotic manifold of particularity that existed in medieval Europe.

7.1 Islamic Studies in Hegel’s Time and Hegel’s Sources

The field that we know today as Islamic studies only became a scholarly discipline at European universities after Hegel’s death.²⁰ This is somewhat surprising given the political importance of the Ottoman Empire for Europe in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Despite the fact that Islamic studies only coalesced into an independent academic discipline at a fairly late date, the Arabic language was often taught in connection with the study of theology, where it was considered a useful supplement to Hebrew.²¹ As was the case with Greek, it was only with time that the study of Arabic emancipated itself from the study of theology and came to be regarded as an independent field. Interest in Arabic and Islamic studies in the German states during Hegel’s time was slow to develop since German thinkers were much more attracted to the mysteries of ancient India than the relatively new religion of Islam.²² But Hegel’s generation saw the creation of several new positions for professors of oriental languages at German-speaking universities (although these positions were, of course, not confined to the instruction of the main languages of Islam: Arabic, Persian, and Turkish).²³ In this field the University of Berlin appointed Georg Heinrich Bernstein (1787–1860) in 1812 and Julius Heinrich Petermann (1801–76) in 1830. There was thus clearly an

¹⁸ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 356; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 453.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 356; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 453.

²⁰ See Johann Fück, *Die arabischen Studien in Europa bis in den Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig: Harrasowitz 1955. Ursula Wokoeck, ‘Islamic Studies: The Emergence of a (sub-)discipline?’ in her *German Orientalism: The Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800 to 1945*, London and New York: Routledge 2009, pp. 164–84. Rudi Paret, *The Study of Arabic and Islam at German Universities: German Orientalists since Theodor Nöldeke*, Wiesbaden: Steiner 1968.

²¹ See Wokoeck, *German Orientalism: The Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800 to 1945*, pp. 108–13.

²² See Suzanne L. Marchand, ‘The Lonely Arabists,’ in her *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010, pp. 118–23.

²³ See Wokoeck, *German Orientalism: The Study of the Middle East and Islam from 1800 to 1945*, p. 88: ‘At sixteen universities, twenty-six new chairs for Oriental languages were established.’ See also *ibid.*, Appendix 3, pp. 234–87.

interest in such things in Hegel's time, and this interest developed quickly towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Some of the pioneers in the field of Arabic and Islamic studies are colourful figures with intriguing biographies. The French linguist and diplomat Guillaume Postel (1510–81) learned Greek and Hebrew (in addition to the modern languages, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese). Due to his language skills he was sent on an embassy mission with the French ambassador to the court of Suleiman the Magnificent in Constantinople in 1535–37.²⁴ There he learned Turkish and Arabic and developed a great interest in Islamic culture. After his return to Europe he published a number of works on linguistics, among others, an Arabic grammar. One of the great figures for Arabic studies in Germany during the Enlightenment was Johann David Michaelis (1717–91), who was professor at the University of Göttingen.²⁵ He taught Semitic languages for years and published his *Arabische Grammatik* in 1771.²⁶ However, Michaelis refused to see Islamic studies as anything more than a useful resource for studying the Hebrew Bible. Antoine Isaac, Baron Silvestre de Sacy (1758–1838) was the first to separate the study of Arabic from theology.²⁷ He wrote grammars and introductory readers for Arabic and trained many students, some of whom came from the German states.²⁸ He single-handedly made Paris the centre for Arabic studies in Europe. In the German-speaking world the Austrian orientalist Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall (1774–1856) is often considered the founder of modern Arabic studies.²⁹ He was trained in oriental languages as a part of an education in the diplomatic corps. The Ottoman Empire constituted his main interest, and his magnum opus is the ten-volume *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches* (1827–35).³⁰ He also translated a large number of texts, especially Ottoman poetry.

²⁴ See Robert Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 2007, pp. 66ff. See also Marion L. Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel: Prophet of the Restitution of All Things, His Life and Thought*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1981.

²⁵ See Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies*, p. 130.

²⁶ Johann David Michaelis, *Erpenii Arabische Grammatik, nebst den Anfang einer arabischen Chrestomathie aus Schultens Anhang zur Erpenischen Grammatik*, Göttingen: Victorin Bossiegel 1771.

²⁷ See Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, p. 87.

²⁸ See Silvestre de Sacy, *Grammaire Arabe à l'usage des élèves de l'École spéciale des Langues Orientales vivantes*, vols 1–2, Paris: L'Imprimerie Impériale 1810. Silvestre de Sacy, *Chrestomathie arabe, ou Extraits de divers écrivains arabes, tant en prose qu'en vers, à l'usage des élèves de l'École spéciale des Langues Orientales vivantes*, vols 1–3, Paris: L'Imprimerie Impériale 1806. For de Sacy's contributions to Arabic studies, see Irwin, *For Lust of Knowing: The Orientalists and Their Enemies*, pp. 141–46.

²⁹ See Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, pp. 119–23. Paula Sutter Fichtner, 'Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall: The Man and His Programme,' in her *Terror and Toleration: The Habsburg Empire Confronts Islam, 1526–1850*, London: Reaktion Books 2008, pp. 130–61. *Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall. Grenzgänge zwischen Orient und Okzident*, ed. by Hannes D. Galter and Siegfried Haas, Graz: Leykam 2008.

³⁰ Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, *Geschichte des Osmanischen Reiches*, vols 1–10, Pest: C.A. Hartleben 1827–35.

Hegel's sources about Islam and the Persian and Arab world are manifold. In the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, he refers to the classic *A Thousand and One Nights*,³¹ which he owned in a fifteen-volume edition.³² He also possessed a copy of *Der Diwan* by the Persian poet Khwaja Shams-ud-Din Muhammad Hafez-e Shirazi, known simply as Hafiz (1325/26–1389/90). His library contains a German translation of this work by Hammer-Purgstall,³³ which was influential for Goethe's famous collection of poems, *West-Eastern Diwan* (1819).³⁴ Hegel refers to the poem *The Maqamat* (or The Meetings) by the Arabic poet Muhammad al-Qasim ibn Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Uthman al-Hariri, known as Al-Hariri of Basra (1054–1122), which was translated into German in an edition by the poet and orientalist Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866).³⁵ Having studied Persian with Hammer-Purgstall in Vienna, Rückert also produced a translation of some poetry of the celebrated Persian poet and scholar Jalal-ed-Din Rumi (1207–73).³⁶ Hegel refers to this positively in his lectures and in the *Encyclopaedia*.³⁷ He also makes reference to August Tholuck's collection of excerpts from Eastern mystics, which includes a long section on Rumi and a chapter on the role of mysticism in Islam.³⁸ Hegel owned Joseph Görres' *Das Heldenbuch von Iran aus dem Schah Nameh des Firdussi*,³⁹ the Persian epic poem by the poet Ferdowsi. He also shows some familiarity with the Qur'an.⁴⁰

With regard to travel literature, Hegel was familiar with Carsten Niebuhr's voyage to the Arabian peninsula in 1761–68 via the account given in Jacob Samuel Wyttenbach's *Reise und Beobachtungen durch Aegypten und Arabien aus den*

³¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1073; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 369. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1097; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 401. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1192; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 524.

³² *Tausend und eine Nacht: arabische Erzählungen*, trans. by Christian Maximilian Habicht, Friedrich Heinrich von Hagen, and Karl Scholl, vols 1–15, Breslau: Josef Max 1825 (*Hegel's Library*, 930–44).

³³ Mohammed Schemsed-din Hafis, *Der Diwan von Mohammed Schemsed-din Hafis*, trans. by Joseph von Hammer-Purgstall, vols 1–2, Stuttgart and Tübingen: Cotta 1812–13 (*Hegel's Library*, 813–14). See *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 370; *Jub.*, vol. 12, pp. 492–3.

³⁴ Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, Stuttgart (sic): Cotta 1819. (*Hegel's Library*, 808). See Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 275; *Jub.*, vol. 12, p. 370. *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 370; *Jub.*, vol. 12, pp. 492–3. *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, pp. 610–11; *Jub.*, vol. 13, pp. 239–40. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1058; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 349. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1145; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 463.

³⁵ Friedrich Rückert, *Die Verwandlungen des Ebu Seid von Serüg oder die Makâmen des Hariri, in freier Nachbildung*, Part 1, Stuttgart and Tübingen: Johann Friedrich Cotta 1826. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1097; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 401. See also *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 610; *Jub.*, vol. 13, p. 239.

³⁶ Friedrich Rückert, 'Mewlana Dschelaleddin Rumi,' in *Taschenbuch für Damen auf das Jahr 1821*, Tübingen: Cotta 1821, pp. 211–48.

³⁷ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 368; *Jub.*, vol. 12, p. 490. *Phil. of Mind*, § 573, pp. 308–13; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 466–69.

³⁸ August Tholuck, *Blüthensammlung aus der Morgenländischen Mystik nebst einer Einleitung über Mystik überhaupt und Morgenländische insbesondere*, Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler 1825. Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, § 573, p. 310n.; *Jub.*, vol. 10, p. 468n.

³⁹ See Joseph Görres, *Das Heldenbuch von Iran aus dem Schah Nameh des Firdussi*, vols 1–2, Berlin: G. Reimar 1820 (*Hegel's Library*, 807).

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 1045; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 333.

grossen Werken verschiedener gelehrten Reisenden.⁴¹ In his library Hegel had a copy of the second edition of the work *Voyage dans le Levant en 1817 et 1818* by Louis Nicolas Philippe Auguste, comte de Forbin (1779–1841).⁴² After a career in the military, Forbin was the curator of the Louvre Museum. In 1817 he embarked on an expedition to the Levant in order to obtain works of art for the museum after it had been depleted in the wake of the fall of Napoleon, when many works had to be returned to Italy. This account tells of a journey that the author took to Constantinople, Syria, Jerusalem, and Egypt.

7.2 The Concept of Islam

According to Hegel, the basic conception of the divine in Islam is the unitary God. Given this, it is understandable that he is at pains to distinguish Islam conceptually from the two other great monotheistic religions: Judaism and Christianity. Thus, a significant part of his analysis is contrastive, whereby he attempts to demonstrate the concept of the divine in Islam by opposing it to the concept in the other two religions.

With regard to Judaism, Hegel sees a certain family resemblance between the conception of the God of the Jews and Allah. He explains, 'It was first in the Jewish and then later in the Mohammedan religions that God was interpreted as the Lord and essentially *only* as the Lord.'⁴³ Both religions take their God to be one and absolute, and this constitutes an important point of similarity. However, Hegel understands Islam as a further development and specifically as a movement away from what he perceives as a form of particularity found in Judaism: 'Jehovah was only the God of that one people—the God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob; only with the Jews had this God made a covenant; only to this people had he revealed himself. That specialty of religion was done away with in Mohammedanism.'⁴⁴ While Judaism is fundamentally a national religion reserved for the chosen people, Islam eliminates this element and makes a claim to people of all nations.⁴⁵ Hegel explains this in more detail in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*:

⁴¹ Jacob Samuel Wyttenbach, *Reise und Beobachtungen durch Aegypten und Arabien aus den grossen Werken verschiedener gelehrten Reisenden*, vols 1–2, Bern und Winterthur: bey der typographischen Gesellschaft & Heinrich Steiner 1779–81 (*Hegel's Library*, 716).

⁴² Monsieur le Comte de Forbin, *Voyage dans le Levant en 1817 et 1818*, 2nd ed., Paris: Delaunay, Libraire 1819 (*Hegel's Library*, 663).

⁴³ Hegel, *EL*, § 112, Addition, p. 177; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 265. See also *EL*, § 151, Addition, p. 226; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 340.

⁴⁴ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 356; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 454.

⁴⁵ In the *Encyclopedia*, this is put in very general terms: 'In Mohammedanism the limited principle of the Jews is expanded into universality and thereby overcome.' Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, § 393, Addition, p. 44; *Jub.*, vol. 10, p. 76.

This religion has in general the same content as the Jewish religion, but the relationship in which human beings stand is broadened. No particularity remains to it; here there is no defining characteristic like the Jewish sense of national value. Here there is no limitation to a particular people; humanity relates itself to the One as purely abstract self-consciousness.⁴⁶

In contrast to Jehovah, Allah is an inclusive, universal God who has a relation to all human beings not just a specific group. In Islam, 'all limits, all national and caste distinctions vanish; no particular race, political claim of birth or possession is regarded—only *man* as a *believer*.'⁴⁷ This can be regarded as a socially progressive movement in that it undermines repressive institutions such as slavery or rigid class distinctions. Further, it overcomes a degree of the alienation that is found in Judaism. Hegel explains:

Anyone, from any people, who fears God is pleasing to him, and human beings have value only to the extent that they take as their truth the knowledge that this is the One, the essence. The differentiation of subjects according to their station in life or class is sublated; there may be classes, there may even be slaves, but this is merely accidental.⁴⁸

Islam thus overcomes the differences of nationality, and this is, for Hegel, clearly a positive development.

Islam also represents a contrastive concept to Christianity. Here too there is a dialectic of identity and difference at work. Islam shares some important features with Christianity, for example, its conception of one absolute God. In the *Encyclopedia*, we read, 'Here, God is no longer, as with the Asiatics, contemplated as existent in an immediately sensuous mode but is apprehended as the one infinite sublime power beyond all the multiplicity of the world.'⁴⁹ Hegel thus distinguishes Islam from, for example, Hinduism, since the latter is focused on the particular empirical incarnations of the divine. According to his developmental conception, Islam and Christianity clearly represent a higher conception of the divine based on thought and not the senses. Second, as just noted, Islam, like Christianity, makes a universal claim to all people, regardless of nationality: 'It is a spiritual religion like the Jewish, but its God is [available] for self-consciousness only within the abstract knowing spirit. Its God is on a par with the Christian God to the extent that no particularity is retained.'⁵⁰ This feature was important for

⁴⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 242; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 171–2.

⁴⁷ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 357; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 455.

⁴⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 243; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 172.

⁴⁹ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, § 393, Addition, p. 44; *Jub.*, vol. 10, p. 76.

⁵⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 243; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 172.

Islam having a wide international appeal during the time of its expansion in the seventh and eighth centuries.

But, according to Hegel's speculative logic, although Christianity and Islam share certain key features, some important differences between these two forms of monotheism inevitably emerge. In its insistence on the unity of the divine, Islam radically rejects the empirical realm of particularity. God is what is infinite, absolute, and true, whereas the mundane world is transitory, corrupt, and of no ultimate value. The key difference between Christianity and Islam, according to Hegel, lies in the fact that the former recognizes the validity of the particular, without this impinging on or compromising the universal; specifically, through the person of Christ, the truth of the particular is accorded its due. This becomes incorporated into the dogma of the Trinity, which contains a particular element. Hegel explains this as follows: 'The antithesis consists in the fact that in Christianity spirituality is developed concretely within itself and is known as Trinity, as spirit.'⁵¹ Moreover, in Christianity God is conceived to be active in the Christian community via the Holy Spirit. By contrast, in Islam God remains transcendent, beyond the world and the community of believers.

The key to the difference between Islam and Christianity thus lies in their varying interpretations of the role and status of Christ. According to Hegel, what is essential is that Islam denies the divine any form of particularity and thus must interpret Christ not as the incarnation of God but merely as a prophet. Islam cannot grasp the speculative identity of universal and particular that is found in the Christian Trinity. It is thus left to understand Christ as a mere particular, albeit a special one.

The other key difference between Islam and Christianity lies in the fact that in the latter human life and activity are conceived as something concrete. Hegel has in mind here the Christian account of how individuals are born in sin but through Christ can achieve reconciliation and salvation. Essentially, human beings can have a concrete positive goal that can be realized in history. According to Hegel, this is precisely what Islam denies: 'The religion of Islam . . . hates and proscribes everything concrete; its God is the absolute One, in relation to whom human beings retain for themselves no purpose, no private domain, nothing peculiar to themselves.'⁵² Humans as individuals can have no meaningful concrete goals or pursuits since these are always tainted by the realm of particularity and condemned ahead of time to be vain and useless when compared to God and the transcendent sphere. In Christianity, by contrast, the idea that God became incarnate and entered the world implies that the divine is alive in the mundane sphere, which is thus invested with an importance of its own.

⁵¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 243; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 172.

⁵² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 243; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 172.

7.3 The Shortcoming of the Concept

According to Hegel, the problem with Islam lies in its abstraction. This has a double effect: the deity remains indeterminate, and the empirical world becomes a matter of vanity and arbitrariness. With regard to the first of these, Hegel explains, in Islam 'God is in Himself the perfectly undefined.'⁵³ Islam's insistence on God as one results in pure universality. Allah is not internally differentiated in a speculative manner; instead, he is pure abstraction. Hegel explains, 'this One is deprived of every concrete predicate; so that neither does subjectivity become on its part spiritually free, nor on the other hand is the object of veneration concrete.'⁵⁴ For subjectivity to arise, the universal must become particular and enter the realm of actuality, performing concrete acts and having concrete interests and investments.

As noted, the view that God is absolute and one leads to a disdain for the transitory world around us. In Islam, God's 'activity is altogether abstract, and hence the particulars produced thereby are perfectly contingent; if we speak of the necessity of things, the term is meaningless and incomprehensible, and no attempt should be made to comprehend it. The activity of God is thus perfectly devoid of reason.'⁵⁵ All human activities and projects are conceived as vain in comparison with the divine. Hegel thus claims that the work of the Muslims 'is rather the dissolution of all that is definite in this substance, with which is associated mere changeableness as the abstract moment of negativity'.⁵⁶

But despite this disdain for the empirical world, the individual cannot help but live and act in it. This then leads to the negative consequence that those actions quickly become arbitrary:

Inasmuch as they exist, humans do in any case create a private domain for themselves in their inclinations and interests, and these are all the more savage and unrestrained in this case because they lack reflection. But coupled with this is also the complete opposite, namely, the tendency to let everything take its own course, indifference with respect to every purpose, absolute fatalism, indifference to life; no practical purpose has any essential value.⁵⁷

This can parade as a kind of highness of mind which is elevated above the triviality of daily life, observing a kind of Stoic indifference to the events of the world, which are all meaningless from the perspective of God. This is, according to Hegel, a dangerous constellation since it invariably leads to the undifferentiated

⁵³ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 33; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 129.

⁵⁴ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 356; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 454.

⁵⁵ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 33; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 129.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 33; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 129.

⁵⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 243; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 172.

destruction of the existing world. An abstraction can be interpreted in manifold ways and can be used and applied in many different contexts.

This abstract universality is thus accompanied by a negative and critical conception of the existing secular world. According to Hegel's view, this in turn leads to a form of fanaticism.⁵⁸ (It has been suggested that Hegel's use of the term 'fanaticism' to characterize Islam comes from Voltaire's tragedy *Le Fanatisme, ou Mohomet le Prophète* from 1742;⁵⁹ however, this remains uncertain especially since Hegel has very little to say about the prophet Mohammed himself.) Without any concrete content in the divine, the door is open for individuals to fill this with their own content, which can be entirely arbitrary:

Abstraction swayed the minds of the Mohammedans. Their object was to establish an abstract worship, and they struggled for its accomplishment with the greatest enthusiasm. This enthusiasm was *fanaticism*, that is, an enthusiasm for something abstract—for an abstract thought which sustains a negative position towards the established order of things.⁶⁰

Hegel frequently repeats this claim that the conception of the divine in Islam leads to fanaticism. He explains elsewhere: 'But since human beings are in fact practical and active, their purpose can only be to bring about the veneration of the One in all humanity. Thus the religion of Islam is essentially fanatical.'⁶¹ Hegel distinguishes Judaism from Islam on this point: for the Jews other peoples 'are called upon to glorify the Lord, but that they should come to do so is only a wish, not a real purpose or goal; as a goal we first find it in Islam. Here it is only a singular purpose that all peoples should be brought to glorify the Lord. So it is not fanatical; only in Islam does it become so.'⁶² Since Judaism is a national religion, the Jews are not so invested in converting other peoples to believe in their God. They are content to leave the gentiles in their errors. By contrast, Islam is a universal religion that is not confined to national boundaries. A part of what Hegel regards as the fanaticism of Islam is the way in which its followers attempt to spread their religion to others.

Hegel points out that the real world has real problems and issues that need to be resolved in practical ways. These cannot be addressed adequately by a view that simply dismisses the world as corrupt, transitory, and meaningless and makes appeal to an abstract God with no concrete content. The problem, according to

⁵⁸ See Will Dudley, 'The Active Fanaticism of Political and Religious Life: Hegel on Terror and Islam,' pp. 119–31.

⁵⁹ See Hans Joachim Schoeps, 'Die ausserchristlichen Religion bei Hegel,' *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1955, p. 33.

⁶⁰ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 358; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 456.

⁶¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 243; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 173.

⁶² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 438; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 337.

Hegel's account, is that Islam can recognize no human goal or action as essential or meaningful since it despises all particularity. Some recognition must be given to the realm of the finite as well.⁶³

Hegel portrays the follower of Islam as being driven by a single passion. But since this passion is not guided by any concrete or determinate content, it can be both positive and negative: the follower of Islam 'is superlatively cruel, cunning, bold, or generous.'⁶⁴ According to Hegel, this same feature is found in Arabic literature:

There arises the more inflexible independence of personal character, and objects too are allowed to possess their circumscribed and definitely fixed immediate reality. With these beginnings of the independence of individuality there are then bound up at the same time true friendship, hospitality, sublime generosity, but all the same an infinite thirst for revenge, an inextinguishable memory of a hatred which makes room and satisfaction for itself by pitiless passion and absolute unfeeling cruelty. But what happens on this soil appears as human, within the sphere of human affairs; there are deeds of revenge, relations of love, traits of self-sacrificing generosity from which the fantastic and wonderful have vanished, so that everything is presented fixedly and definitely in accordance with the necessary connection of things.⁶⁵

With this arbitrariness Islam is able to reach both the heights and the depths of the human spirit. Hegel readily recognizes the positive element in this: 'It is the essence of fanaticism to bear only a desolating destructive relation to the concrete; but that of Mohammedism was, at the same time, capable of the greatest elevation—an elevation free from all petty interests, and united with all the virtues that appertain to magnanimity and valor.'⁶⁶ In short, fanaticism is a dialectical concept that can be equally a force of good or evil, depending on the will and disposition of the individual who is obliged to give the abstraction some kind of particular content.⁶⁷

⁶³ See Hegel, *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 3, p. 33; *Jub.*, vol. 19, p. 129: 'The activity of God is thus represented as perfectly devoid of reason. This abstract negativity, combined with the permanent unity, is thus a fundamental conception in the Oriental way of looking at things.... Thus the Arabians developed the sciences and philosophy, without further defining the concrete Idea; their work is rather the dissolution of all that is definite in this substance, with which is associated mere changeableness as the abstract moment of negativity.'

⁶⁴ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 358; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 457.

⁶⁵ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 430; *Jub.*, vol. 13, p. 7.

⁶⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 358; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 456.

⁶⁷ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 359; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 457: 'Never has enthusiasm, as such, performed greater deeds. Individuals may be enthusiastic for what is noble and exalted in various particular forms. The enthusiasm of a people for its independence has also a definite aim. But abstract and therefore all-comprehensive enthusiasm—restrained by nothing, finding its limits nowhere, and absolutely indifferent to all beside—is that of the Mohammedan East.'

This universal passion for the abstract, indeterminate divinity is, according to Hegel, the reason that the Arab political power could not sustain itself for long. He claims: 'But Islamic fanaticism emerged from the Near East itself, destroying every individuality of these peoples, wiping out all differences, as a principle in which all are equal but at the same time one evidently incapable of forming a political relationship.'⁶⁸ While Islam has a progressive side in its elimination of differences between people, it likewise has a destructive side. Moreover, for Hegel, the general view of Islam is that all human activities, institutions, and governments are subordinate to God: 'The worship of the One is the only final aim of Mohammedanism, and subjectivity has this worship for the sole occupation of its activity, combined with the design to subjugate secular existence to the One.'⁶⁹ This means that no secular institution or power has ultimate validity. Since the divine is conceived to be entirely transcendent, no mundane institution or government is thought to have its blessing or to exist in its form or spirit.

Hegel sums up the problem in his view as follows: 'The defect of [Islam] consists generally in [its] not giving the finite its due.'⁷⁰ In failing to recognize the divine in the world, Islam can be a force that negates the world. While abstraction and universality can be positive and beneficial in combatting the opposite extreme of fragmentation and particularity, it is only one side of a complex dialectical concept. Since it is only one side, for Hegel, it lacks the balance that Christianity has in its unity of the universal and the particular, the abstract God and the concrete, incarnate one.

7.4 The Positive Role of Islam in the Development of Freedom and History

Nevertheless Islam has an important role to play in the development of history, according to Hegel's understanding. Together with Judaism and Christianity, Islam defeats the Eastern religions, which base their conceptions of the divine on the senses. Islam is a religion for thought and not for picture-thinking. For this reason it forbids the portrayal of God or the prophet.⁷¹ The point is that one should not see them but think them:

The Divine, explicitly regarded as unity and universality, is essentially only present to thinking and, as in itself imageless, is not susceptible to being imaged

⁶⁸ Hegel, *LPWH*, vol. 1, p. 326; *VPWG*, vol. 1, p. 259.

⁶⁹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 356; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 454.

⁷⁰ Hegel, *EL*, § 112, Addition, p. 176; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 265. See also *EL*, § 151, Addition, p. 226; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 340.

⁷¹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 357; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 454: 'The object of Mohammedan worship is purely intellectual; no image, no representation of Allah is tolerated.'

and shaped by imagination; for which reason, after all, the Jews and Mohammedans are forbidden to sketch a picture of God in order to bring him nearer to the vision which looks around in the sensuous field. For visual art, which always requires the most concrete vitality of form, there is therefore no room here.⁷²

The prohibition aims to prevent God from becoming anthropomorphic. God is beyond our ability to imagine. Both Islam and Judaism are, to his mind, conceptually higher than the religions of nature that are fixated on the empirical particulars.

Hegel sees in Islam a movement toward the modern principle of subjective freedom, something which one usually associates with his treatment of Western history and culture:

In the Orient it is in general the Mohammedan religion which has as it were cleared the ground by expelling all the idolatry of a finite and imaginative outlook, but has given to the heart the subjective freedom which entirely fills it. The result is that worldly things do not constitute a merely different province, but blossom into a realm of universal freedom where heart and spirit, without framing for themselves an objective embodiment of their god, live cheerfully at peace with themselves; they are like beggars, happy in eating and loving, satisfied and blissful in contemplating and glorifying their objects.⁷³

Hegel clearly regards Islam as an advance over the other religions of the East, which remain caught in the empirical and have not worked their way forward to grasping the divine in terms of a concept.

There is, for Hegel, a positive element in being able to separate oneself from the world and from one's natural being. This is the same start made by the slave in the lordship and bondage dialectic, and it is the same point that is made with the Jewish saying that Hegel repeats, 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.'⁷⁴ Regarding oneself as free from nature is thus an important first step on the road to subjective freedom:

Contrasted with the substantiality of the one God, there is an apprehension of the inner freedom, self-subsistence, and independence of the individual person in himself, so far as the East permitted a development in this direction. For a chief form of this outlook we must look to the Arabs who in their deserts, on the

⁷² Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 175; *Jub.*, vol. 12, p. 241. See also *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 103; *Jub.*, vol. 12, p. 150. *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 42; *Jub.*, vol. 12, p. 72.

⁷³ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 557; *Jub.*, vol. 13, pp. 171–2.

⁷⁴ Psalms 111:10. Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 443; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 344. *PhS*, pp. 117–18; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 156.

infinite sea of their plains, in the clear sky above them, in such natural surroundings have counted only on their own courage and bravery of their fists, as well as on the means of their self-preservation, namely the camel, the horse, the lance and the sword.⁷⁵

While the ability to abstract from and negate one's natural drives and needs is an important first step, it is in itself still not developed freedom. For this what is required is a rational will that wills the universal in the concrete context of rational institutions.

While Islam represents an advance over, for example, Hinduism, it has still not yet attained the level of Christianity. While it has successfully defeated the cult of empirical idolatry and replaced it with an abstract concept, it has not moved forward to give its abstract concept any determinate content. In the *Encyclopedia*, we read:

But the western Asiatic mind which clings to the abstract One does not get as far as the determination, the particularization, of the universal and consequently does not attain to a concrete formation. Here, it is true, this mind destroys the caste system and all its works which prevail in India, and every Mohammedan is free; despotism in the strict meaning of the word does not exist among them. Political life, however, does not yet achieve the form of a rationally organized whole, of a differentiation into special governmental powers.⁷⁶

Islam thus brings with it certain important political advances since it celebrated the equality of all human beings before God. Hegel lauds the egalitarian nature of Muslim society:

At first the Caliphs still maintained entire that simplicity and plainness which characterized the Arabs of the desert . . . and which acknowledged no distinction of station and culture. The meanest Saracen, the most insignificant old woman approached the Caliph as his equals. Unreflecting naiveté does not stand in need

⁷⁵ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 430; *Jub.*, vol. 13, p. 7. This ability to abstract from the world and to see things from a broader perspective is, according to Hegel, evident in Islamic poetry. See *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, pp. 998–9; *Jub.*, vol. 14, p. 273: 'In order to be able to create from his own resources, even when he [sc. the poet] is restricted to some quite narrow and particular sphere, a free whole which does not appear to be determined from without, he must have cut himself free from any practical or other preoccupation in his material and rise superior to it with an eye calmly and freely surveying all existence whether subjective or objective. From the point of view of *natural* capacity we may in this matter give special praise to the Mohammedan poets of the East. From the very start they enter upon this freedom which even in passion remains independent of passion, and amid all variety of interests always retains, as the real kernel of the work, the *one* substance alone, in face of which everything else then appears small and transitory, and passion and desire never have the last word.'

⁷⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, § 393, Addition, p. 44; *Jub.*, vol. 10, pp. 76–7.

of culture; and in virtue of the freedom of Spirit, each one sustains a relation of equality to the ruler.⁷⁷

His praise here is especially striking in contrast to his sharp criticisms of what he regarded as the tyranny and despotism of China and India.

But although it serves the beneficial function of destroying certain repressive institutions such as slavery or the caste system, Islam is not able to construct or develop any rational social and political institutions since, by being fixed in abstract universality, it does not have the conceptual content to do so. Due to its inherent abstraction, it is, for Hegel, unable to provide any concrete content for such institutions. There is nothing determinate with which something new can be constructed. The political problem is thus a reflection of the problem in the conception of the divine.⁷⁸ Unlike Islam, Christianity recognizes the importance of the individual and concrete action in the world. It acknowledges the value of the mundane sphere. It is thus able to go on to produce customs, institutions, and social structures that reflect this. For Islam, however, none of these things can ultimately have any importance or lasting value.

What is particularly intriguing about Hegel's treatment of Islam is that he associates its concept with what he regards as the confused and overly zealous views about religion that one finds in the Enlightenment, specifically the abstract ideals of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror.⁷⁹ In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, the only two religions that he treats after Christianity are Islam and Enlightenment Deism. At the end of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he discusses both of these very briefly as confused concepts.⁸⁰ In the *Encyclopedia*, immediately after giving a thumbnail description of the notion of the divine in Islam, Hegel sketches the related notion from the Enlightenment: 'Another position that has frequently been maintained is that there can be no cognition of God as the "highest essence." This is the general statement of the modern Enlightenment, which is content to say, "*Il y a un être suprême*," and lets the matter rest there.'⁸¹ In short, Allah oddly resembles the abstract god of reason of the deists. This is truly astonishing since Islam and Deism represent two radically different movements, which appeared in different contexts and which are separated by several centuries. Hegel's point seems to be simply that in both

⁷⁷ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 359; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 458.

⁷⁸ Hegel, *Phil. of Mind*, § 393, Addition, pp. 44–5; *Jub.*, vol. 10, p. 77: 'The Christian God is not merely the differenceless One, but the triune God who contains difference within himself, who has become man and who reveals himself. In this religious conception the opposition of universal and particular, of thought and being, is present in its most developed form and yet has been brought back again to unity. Here, then, the particular is not left so quiescent in its immediacy as in Mohammedanism.'

⁷⁹ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 358; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 456.

⁸⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 244; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 173.

⁸¹ Hegel, *EL*, § 112, Addition, p. 177; *Jub.*, vol. 8, p. 265.

cases there is an idea of an all-powerful, transcendent creator God, but who has no real relation to the world of creation or human beings.

Thus, Hegel's view of Islam is somewhat ambivalent. While he is able to appreciate certain elements of Islamic culture and the role of Islam as a historical force, he cannot reconcile himself with what he perceives to be a conception of undifferentiated universality that has, to his mind, in part destructive consequences. This negative criticism brings into focus more clearly the importance of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity for him. For Hegel's metaphysics, what is required is not sheer universality, but universality mediated by particularity.

The Reception of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion

In the years immediately following Hegel's death, the main points of contention about his thought in general involved the interpretation of his philosophy of religion. Even during Hegel's own lifetime, his philosophy was attacked for being inconsistent with Christianity. These initial debates were carried out on a rather limited textual basis since, prior to the publication of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in 1832, there were only scattered treatments of religion and religious topics in his published works. Interpretations of Hegel's views on key issues differed widely even in his lifetime, and little unity was achieved by the publication of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. Marheineke's edition was regarded as questionable by many, since his views were rather conservative, and he was suspected of manipulating the text to make Hegel appear more dogmatically palatable. There were also charges of inconsistency and ambiguity, which needed to be addressed. These issues were taken up in critical reviews of this work by Christian Hermann Weisse (1801–66),¹ the younger Fichte, that is, Immanuel Hermann Fichte (1797–1879),² and the theologian Franz Anton Staudenmaier (1800–56).³

As noted above,⁴ the decision was made to issue a second revised edition of these lectures in 1840.⁵ Marheineke's preface diplomatically justifies the revision by claiming that he had been unable to carry out the work on the original edition adequately since he was under serious time pressure to produce the text soon after

¹ Christian Hermann Weisse, 'Über die eigentliche Grenze des Pantheismus und des philosophischen Theismus,' *Religiöse Zeitschrift für das katholische Deutschland*, 1833, vol. 1, pp. 31–51, pp. 143–53, pp. 227–39; vol. 2, pp. 99–119, pp. 244–69.

² Immanuel Hermann Fichte, 'Hegels Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, nebst einer Schrift über die Beweise vom Daseyn Gottes, herausgegeben von Dr. Ph. Marheinecke. 2 Bände. Berlin 1832. ...,' *Heidelberger Jahrbücher der Literatur*, vol. 26, nos 55–7, 62–3, 1833, p. 880, pp. 881–96, pp. 897–907, pp. 978–92, pp. 993–1008, pp. 1009–10.

³ Franz Anton Staudenmaier, 'Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion. Nebst einer Schrift über die Beweise vom Daseyn Gottes*. Herausgegeben von D. Philipp Marheineke. Erster Band XVI u. 376 S. Zweiter Band 483 S. Berlin 1832 bei Dunker u. Humblot,' *Jahrbücher für Theologie und christliche Philosophie*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1834, pp. 97–158.

⁴ See Introduction, Section 0.5 above.

⁵ Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, vols 1–2, ed. by Philipp Marheineke, vols 11–12, in *Hegel's Werke*, Zweite Auflage, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1840 [1832].

Hegel's death.⁶ A more plausible explanation is the criticism he had been exposed to and the rifts in the Hegel school that were beginning to form at the time. In his preface Marheineke defends himself against the charge of manipulating the text and of being a heavy-handed editor.⁷ The revised version incorporated new lecture notes, including some of Hegel's own, which had been neglected in the first edition, but this new material merely aggravated the problems of continuity and consistency, seemingly offering support for diverse interpretations.

The ensuing debate centred on three main issues: the immortality of the soul, the personhood of God, and the divinity of Christ. These issues will be explored separately here, although they were closely related,⁸ and there is a great deal of overlap among the authors participating in the debates. While the main lines of these discussions will be presented, the primary material is so extensive that an exhaustive account is not possible here.

8.1 The Hegelian Schools

The labels traditionally used to characterize the Hegelian schools of the 1830s and 1840s have long contributed to an oversimplification and distortion of this period in the history of ideas. By dividing the schools into right and left (and sometimes centre) Hegelians, and by distinguishing members of these schools from another group of thinkers designated as 'Hegel critics', intellectual historians have provided a scheme by which the entire period can be neatly ordered and understood. While these broad categories are very familiar, the primary texts of many of the figures involved remain unexplored.

These categories, which have long been used to describe philosophical and religious thought in the nineteenth century, may have lulled scholars into complacency and discouraged more exacting research into the period. Many important figures of the day are rarely studied nowadays: among them, Immanuel Hermann Fichte, Ferdinand Christian Baur, Christian Hermann Weisse, Philipp Marheineke, Friedrich Göschel, and Johann Eduard Erdmann. One reason for their obscurity, I submit, is the incorrect belief that they were simply interchangeable examples of the categories to which they have been assigned. This prejudice has led to a failure to grasp their importance and relevance for current philosophical and religious thinking. These thinkers were in fact quite heterogeneous and

⁶ Philipp Marheineke, 'Vorwort,' in Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, vol. 1, p. vi. (*Jub.* vol. 15, p. 8.)

⁷ Philipp Marheineke, 'Vorwort,' in Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, vol. 1, p. vi. (*Jub.* vol. 15, p. 8.)

⁸ A good example of this is Michelet's *Vorlesungen über die Persönlichkeit Gottes und Unsterblichkeit der Seele oder die ewige Persönlichkeit des Geistes* (Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler 1841), which combines two of the main points of contention.

offer numerous insights that remain pertinent to issues such as secularism, materialism, relativism, and subjectivism. In confronting the difficult interpretative questions regarding Hegel's philosophy of religion, they anticipated the main issues of the discussion in philosophical theology over the subsequent 150 years. Thus, a return to them can, I believe, be a fruitful investment for one seeking insight into the later development of theology and philosophy of religion. But this return, if it is to be meaningful, must be accompanied by a re-evaluation of the basic categories used to understand the period.

Although it can be argued that divisions in the Hegelian school were already taking shape in Hegel's own lifetime, the designations of right, left, and centre Hegelianism were introduced later.⁹ These terms appeared in a polemical treatise by the theologian David Friedrich Strauss, in which he attempted to defend his controversial work, *The Life of Jesus*,¹⁰ against its critics.¹¹ They were subsequently adopted more or less uncritically by later historians of ideas,¹² and only recently have scholars begun to call them into question. Strauss employed the terms to distinguish different responses to the question of Christology. He explains:

There are three possible answers to the question of whether and to what extent the idea of the unity of divine and human nature proved the gospel to be history: the concept proves either the entirety of the history, merely a part of it, or none of it. If each of these answers and directions were indeed represented by a branch of the Hegelian school, then, using the traditional analogy, the first direction, as

⁹ For an account of the development of the German schools of Hegelianism, see the following: William J. Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1970. Jacques D'Hondt, *Hegel et hégélianisme*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1982. Georg Lasson, *Was heisst Hegelianismus?* Berlin: Reuther & Reichard 1916. John Edward Toews, *Hegelianism: The Path toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1980. Warren Breckman, *Marx, the Young Hegelians, and the Origins of Radical Social Theory: Dethroning the Self*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999. David McLellan, *The Young Hegelians and Karl Marx*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan 1970. Ingrid Pepperle, *Junghegelianische Geschichtsphilosophie und Kunsttheorie*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag 1978. Douglas Moggach (ed.), *The New Hegelians: Politics and Philosophy in the Hegelian School*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006.

¹⁰ David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, vols 1–2, Tübingen: Osiander 1835–36. (In English as *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, ed. by Peter C. Hodgson, trans. by George Eliot, Ramsey, NJ: Sigler Press 1994.)

¹¹ David Friedrich Strauss, *Streitschriften zur Vertheidigung meiner Schrift über das Leben Jesu und zur Charakteristik der gegenwärtigen Theologie*, Tübingen: Osiander 1837, pp. 95–126. (In English as *In Defense of My Life of Jesus against the Hegelians*, trans. by Marilyn Chapin Massey, Hamden, CT: Archon Books 1983, see pp. 38–66.) For a further account of these distinctions, see John Edward Toews, 'Right, Centre, and Left: the Division of the Hegelian Schools in the 1830s,' in his *Hegelianism: The Path toward Dialectical Humanism, 1805–1841*, pp. 203–54.

¹² See Carl Ludwig Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel*, vols 1–2, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1837–38, vol. 2, pp. 654–9. Karl Theodor Bayrhafer, *Die Idee und Geschichte der Philosophie*, Leipzig: Otto Wigand 1838, pp. 490–3. One of the first to reject Strauss' categories was Karl Rosenkranz; see his *Kritische Erläuterungen des Hegel'schen Systems*, Königsberg: Bei den Gebrüder Bornträger 1840, pp. vii–xxxvi.

standing closest to the long-established system, could be named the right, the third direction named the left, and the second named the center.¹³

Given their extensive subsequent use, what is striking here is that these distinctions were originally applied to a single, very specific issue.

Later, however, they were extended to other debates and used to summarize much broader tendencies. Right Hegelianism was taken to be the view that Hegel's philosophy was consistent with orthodox Christian doctrines, such as the immortality of the soul, the personhood of God, and the divinity of Christ, and indeed that it provided them with a philosophical anchoring. By contrast, left Hegelianism was taken to be the claim that Hegel's philosophy undermined or demystified Christianity by showing it to be an inadequate form of knowing. While this later formulation of the distinction is clearly related to Strauss' original one, it is considerably broader and vaguer.

The historical aspect of Hegel's lectures was not fully appreciated at the time. The two best-known Hegelians, Strauss and Feuerbach, focused almost exclusively on the question of Christianity and had little to say about the other religions of the world. This initial neglect of any treatment of the world's religions cast a long shadow in the reception of Hegel's philosophy of religion. However, this is not to say that the historical dimension of Hegel's lectures is irrelevant for the issues that constituted the flashpoints in the traditional debates about Hegel's philosophy of religion. In fact, a full appreciation for Hegel's approach to the non-Christian religions can help to shed light on these old interpretive controversies.

8.2 The Immortality Debate

Among the principal charges against Hegel's system was that it failed to admit the immortality of the soul.¹⁴ While Kant had been reproached for claiming that this doctrine could not be rationally demonstrated but instead had to be presupposed as a postulate, Hegel was criticized for avoiding the issue entirely. His conception of immortality, it was argued, concerned only the development of a collective world Spirit and had nothing to do with individual immortality. Further, the denial of the doctrine of immortality was regarded as a denial of the doctrine of

¹³ Strauss, *Streitschriften*, p. 95. *Defense*, p. 38. Translation modified.

¹⁴ For this debate see Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel*, vol. 2, pp. 638–45. Wilhelm Stähler, *Zur Unsterblichkeitsproblematik in Hegels Nachfolge*, Münster: Universitas-Verlag 1928. Gerald Frankenhäuser, *Die Auffassung von Tod und Unsterblichkeit in der klassischen deutschen Philosophie von Immanuel Kant bis Ludwig Feuerbach*, Frankfurt am Main: Haag und Herchen 1991. Walter Jaeschke, 'Persönlichkeit Gottes und Unsterblichkeit der Seele,' in his *Hegel Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Schule*, Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler 2003, pp. 510–15. Johann Eduard Erdmann, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, vols 1–2, Berlin: Verlag von Wilhelm Hertz 1866, vol. 2, pp. 650–4.

divine justice, which seemed to require an afterlife to be realized. Such a view placed Hegel's philosophy at odds with orthodox Christianity, despite his own protests of consistency. The suspicion was that, finding the doctrine of immortality implausible, Hegel discreetly tried to avoid the issue.

Hegel's silence about the question of immortality caused particular problems for Hegelian theologians, who were attempting to work out a speculative Christian dogmatics. One such theologian was Marheineke himself, who treated this issue in 1827.¹⁵ Marheineke argues his case for the blessed immortal state through Hegel's speculative logic. Our natural finite existence necessarily implies an infinite one, which resists change and guarantees identity through it. The true form of immortality, consistent with the Christian view, lies in Spirit.¹⁶ Marheineke is critical of the popular conceptions of immortality based on the senses, arguing that such conceptions grasp only the finite and the particular; but he is also critical of the Kantian doctrine of immortality as a mere postulate that cannot be known.¹⁷ As he sees it, Kant's view is based on purely abstract thinking and has no contact with the particular. The speculative conception unites these two: Marheineke argues that immortality is known in Christianity in the same way that God is known through revelation. In Christ the universal is united with the particular, the divine with the human. It is here that the true conception of immortality must be sought.¹⁸ He goes on to develop a Christian account of the raising of the dead and the Last Judgement.

The first attacks on Hegel for failing to put forth a doctrine of immortality took place during his lifetime. In 1828, Karl Ernst Schubarth (1796–1861) and Karl Anton Carganico (1801–58) published a monograph on Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, in which they argued that Hegel failed to mention this key doctrine since it did not accord with the immanent nature of his system.¹⁹ Hegel responded in a joint book review of five different works critical of his philosophy.²⁰ Although Hegel indignantly dismisses Schubarth's accusation, he

¹⁵ Philipp Marheineke, *Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik als Wissenschaft*, Zweite, völlig neu ausgearbeitete Auflage, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1827, §§ 592–601, pp. 381–7.

¹⁶ Marheineke, *Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik als Wissenschaft*, § 594, p. 382.

¹⁷ Marheineke, *Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik als Wissenschaft*, § 599, pp. 385–6.

¹⁸ Marheineke, *Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik als Wissenschaft*, § 600, p. 386.

¹⁹ K. E. Schubarth and K. A. Carganico, *Ueber Philosophie überhaupt, und Hegel's Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften insbesondere. Ein Beitrag zur Beurtheilung der letztern*, Berlin: Enslin 1829, pp. 142ff.

²⁰ Hegel, '1. Über die Hegelsche Lehre, oder: absolutes Wissen und moderner Pantheismus. Leipzig 1829. bei Chr. E. Kollmann. S. 236. 2. Über Philosophie überhaupt und Hegels Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften insbesondere. Ein Beitrag zur Beurtheilung der letztern. Von Dr. K. E. Schubarth und Dr. L. A. Carganico. Berlin 1829, in der Enslin'schen Buchhandlung. S. 222. 3. Ueber den gegenwärtigen Standpunkt der philosophischen Wissenschaft, in besonderer Beziehung auf das System Hegels. Von E. H. Weiße, Prof. an der Universität zu Leipzig. Leipzig 1829. Verlag von Joh. Ambr. Barth. S. 228. 4. Briefe gegen die Hegel'sche Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften. Erstes Heft, vom Standpunkte der Encyclopädie und der Philosophie. Berlin 1929. bei John. Chr. Fr. Enslin. S. 94. 5. Ueber Seyn, Nichts und Werden. Einige Zweifel an der Lehre des Hrn. Prof. Hegel. Berlin, Posen und Bromberg, bei E. S. Mittler 1829. S. 24,' *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, 1829, Erster

fails to offer an alternate position which might allay the original suspicion. He simply implies, without elaboration, that a doctrine of immortality is to be found in the correct understanding of the concept of Spirit.

Ludwig Feuerbach, who was one of Hegel's students, anonymously published his *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* in 1830,²¹ in which he argued that immortality should be understood not as the continued existence of the consciousness of individuals but rather as the collective historical memory of humanity in which individuals are preserved. His stated goal was not to eliminate the doctrine of immortality, but to clarify its proper meaning. While this work is still read today, at the time it exercised only a limited influence, although it cost Feuerbach his university post. It is less concerned with explaining Hegel's views than with advancing an independent position.

In 1831, in a widely disseminated work,²² Karl Heinrich Ernst Paulus (1766–1857) defended the doctrine of immortality from a Christian perspective; and Bernhard Heinrich Blasche (1766–1832) attempted to refute various traditional conceptions of immortality.²³ These works, like Feuerbach's, have little to say about Hegel's philosophy as such, and, in any case, the textual basis available at the time was still too limited to adjudicate the issue. With Marheineke's 1832 edition of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, the situation changed. It was here that one might expect a fully developed doctrine of immortality, if indeed Hegel had one.

The debate proper was initiated by two works by Friedrich Richter (1802–56), both published in 1833. In *Die Lehre von den letzten Dingen*,²⁴ Richter categorizes the various traditional arguments for immortality as anthropological, cosmological, historical-philosophical, or theological, and argues that each is inadequate. His next work, *Die neue Unsterblichkeitslehre*,²⁵ created a sensation with its claim

Artikel (July), vol. II, nos 10, 11, pp. 77–88; nos 13, 14, pp. 97–109. Zweiter Artikel (August), vol. II, nos 37, 38, 39, pp. 293–308; no. 40, pp. 313–18. Dritter Artikel (December), nos 117, 118, 119, 120, pp. 936–60. Hegel only managed to cover two of the five works in this review. *Jub.*, vol. 20, pp. 314–93.

²¹ [Ludwig Feuerbach], *Gedanken über Tod und Unsterblichkeit aus den Papieren eines Denkers, nebst einem Anhang theologisch-satyrischer Xenien, herausgegeben von einem seiner Freunde*, Nürnberg: J. A. Stein 1830. (English translation: *Thoughts on Death and Immortality. From the Papers of a Thinker, along with an Appendix of Theological-Satirical Epigrams*, trans. by James A. Massey, Berkeley: University of California Press 1980.)

²² C. H. E. Paulus, *Ueber die Unsterblichkeit des Menschen und den Zustand des Lebens nach dem Tode, auf den Grund der Vernunft und göttlicher Offenbarung*, Reutlingen: Joh. Conr. Mäcken jun. 2nd supplemented and improved ed. 1831.

²³ B. H. Blasche, *Philosophische Unsterblichkeitslehre. Oder: Wie offenbart sich das ewige Leben?* Erfurt and Gotha: Flinzer 1831.

²⁴ Friedrich Richter, *Die Lehre von den letzten Dingen. Eine wissenschaftliche Kritik, aus dem Standpunkt der Religion unternommen. Erster Band, welcher die Kritik der Lehre vom Tode, von der Unsterblichkeit und von den Mittelzuständen enthält*, Breslau: In Joh. Friedr. Korn des älteren Buchhandlung 1833. (See also Zweiter Band. *Die letzten Dinge in objectiver Rücksicht oder die Lehre vom jüngsten Tage*, Berlin: Richter 1844.)

²⁵ Friedrich Richter, *Die neue Unsterblichkeitslehre: Gespräch einer Abendgesellschaft, als Supplement zu Wielands Euthanasia*, Breslau: Georg Friedrich Aderholz 1833.

that the Christian doctrine of immortality was an outmoded prejudice or superstition maintained by egoists, who lacked a proper sense of religious resignation. Richter particularly provoked some Hegelians by claiming that the inherent nature of Hegel's thought precluded any doctrine of immortality. Richter did not consider this perceived absence to be a detriment and generally regarded himself as a proponent of Hegel's philosophy.

Richter's *Die Lehre von den letzten Dingen* was criticized by the Leipzig theologian Christian Hermann Weisse in the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik* in September 1833.²⁶ Weisse notes that although Richter claims to be a Hegelian, his views departed from those of other Hegelians on numerous points.²⁷ He argues that Hegel's philosophy correctly criticizes any abstract conception of the beyond and provides the basis for a doctrine of immortality: 'Everything, as one sees, depends on grasping the idea of the spiritual Absolute not in empty abstraction but in a living, even absolutely spiritual intuition, and knowing that this idea is not foreign and external to the forms in which it is developed, but rather immediate and completely one and the same with them.'²⁸ However, at the end of the review Weisse leaves the matter as a future task and thus fails to develop it further.

This review was criticized by theologians who suspected that Weisse tacitly agreed with Richter, and that the denial of the belief in personal immortality was a secret closely kept by the Hegelian school. According to this interpretation, Weisse's main criticism was that Richter had indiscreetly divulged this position. Weisse responded in 1834, attempting more explicitly to distance himself from Richter.²⁹ The tone of this work is far more defensive than his previous review. Weisse expresses his belief in immortality, but argues that it should be understood in terms of absolute Spirit rather than psychology or anthropology.³⁰ He finds evidence for it particularly in the realm of aesthetics.³¹ When one beholds something beautiful, one gains a sense of the immortal and enduring element that transcends the empirical particular. It is this immortal element which enables us to perceive beauty and gain a sense of the immortal forces of the human spirit that exist behind the changing empirical phenomena. Aesthetic consciousness thus leads to an awareness of what is immortal in the human spirit. This argument from aesthetics is repeated in the other spheres of absolute Spirit. For example, one's ethical actions evidence an intuition of something higher and enduring

²⁶ Christian Hermann Weisse, 'Die Lehre von den letzten Dingen. Eine wissenschaftliche Kritik, aus dem Standpunkt der Religion unternommen, von Dr. Friedrich Richter von Magdeburg. Erster Band. Breslau, 1833. XV. 245 S. gr. 8,' *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, September 1833, nos 41–2, pp. 321–7, pp. 329–34.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 323.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 334.

²⁹ Christian Hermann Weisse, *Die philosophische Geheimlehre von der Unsterblichkeit des menschlichen Individuums*, Dresden: Ch. F. Grimmer 1834. Weisse reprints his previous book review of Richter's *Die Lehre von den letzten Dingen* in an appendix to this work, *ibid.*, pp. 62–80.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 36ff.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 46ff.

beyond one's other simple deeds. There is an immortal justice or morality which we strive to achieve, and our awareness of it is a proof that we participate in it.

Hegel's apologist Göschel reviewed Richter's work in the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik* in January of 1834, criticizing it as a distortion of Hegel's thought.³² Encouraged by Hegel's own positive reception of his *Aphorismen*, Göschel was convinced that Hegel's philosophy was consistent with orthodox Christian doctrines, and that one could find in his texts clear evidence of a theory of personal immortality. The question is how Hegel's philosophy can conceive the eternal existence of the individual in a speculative manner without slipping into a non-speculative understanding of it as a temporal form of the bad infinity or an endless series. The second article ends with quotations,³³ primarily from the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, which are intended to demonstrate the presence of the doctrine of immortality in Hegel's thought.

The next intervention in this debate was Immanuel Hermann Fichte's *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen Fortdauer*, which also appeared in 1834.³⁴ Fichte makes it clear that this work is an attack on Göschel's Hegel *apologia*. Rather than analyse individual textual passages in Hegel that can be interpreted as a doctrine of immortality, as Göschel does, Fichte argues that Hegel's philosophy as an abstract theoretical structure is in principle unsuited for such a doctrine, which lies beyond the grasp of human reason. For Fichte, Hegel's failure to incorporate the doctrine within his system is an inherent necessity rather than a simple omission.

Fichte then gives his own arguments for personal immortality. Chief among them is that all objects in nature have their own unique predisposition and cannot perish until this predisposition is actualized or fulfilled. Thus, human beings cannot completely cease to exist with physical death since they have yet to perfect their natural predisposition. Moreover, we have a natural a priori conception of immortality as the necessary opposite of the finite and perishable things that appear to our experience. Finitude and perishability only make sense as the opposites of infinity and imperishability, which they necessarily presuppose. Here, somewhat ironically, Fichte uses the Hegelian dialectic to argue for the conceptual necessity of immortality.

Another exchange involving the question of immortality took place between Karl Rosenkranz and Carl Friedrich Bachmann (1785–1855). Bachmann initially criticized Hegel in his 1833 *Ueber Hegel's System*, where he revives the charge that

³² Carl Friedrich Göschel, *Die neue Unsterblichkeitslehre. Gespräch einer Abendgesellschaft, als Supplement zu Wielands Euthanasia*. Herausgg. von Dr. Friedr. Richter, von Magdeburg, Breslau bei Georg Friedrich Aderholz 1833. 79 S. kl. 8, *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, Erster Artikel, January 1834, nos 1–3, pp. 1–4, pp. 9–16, pp. 17–22; Zweiter Artikel, nos 17–19, pp. 131–5, pp. 138–47.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 139–44.

³⁴ Immanuel Hermann Fichte, *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen Fortdauer*, Elberfeld: Büschler 1834.

Hegel's philosophical edifice has no room for personal immortality since only the Idea is immortal. He castigates Hegel for not being forthright about his presumed position: 'one would only have expected that Hegel would have had the courage to express himself openly about this problem and admit that he denied immortality.'³⁵ Rosenkranz responded to Bachmann in an open letter.³⁶ He cites Göschel's argument that there is such a doctrine in Hegel's works, based on the theory of subjectivity.³⁷ He develops an extended criticism of the friend of his youth, Richter, whose charges were the original occasion for these debates. Bachmann's 1835 rejoinder, entitled *Anti-Hegel*, notes Rosenkranz's failure to enter into a discussion of the actual question at issue.³⁸ He condemns Rosenkranz's appeal to the authority of Göschel and states his agreement with the younger Fichte's refutation of Göschel's views in *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit*.³⁹ Göschel's purported reconstruction of Hegel's position is rather, he argues, a radical departure from the Hegelian system.

In response to the charges raised by the younger Fichte, Göschel published in 1835 his *Von den Beweisen für die Unsterblichkeit der menschlichen Seele*.⁴⁰ This work presents some traditional proofs for the immortality of the soul and then proceeds to explore the proofs offered by Hegel's speculative philosophy. Göschel points out an analogy between the three traditional proofs for the existence of God—the cosmological, the teleological, and the ontological—and the traditional proofs for the immortality of the soul. Each proof works by inferring from something given, that is, the existence of the world, the purposefulness of the world, or the concept of the most perfect being, to the desired conclusion, that is, the existence of God. The proofs for the immortality of the soul function in the same manner. The cosmological proof of immortality starts with the immediate existence of the indivisible soul and infers to its immortality. Likewise, the teleological proof takes as its point of departure the purposefulness of human action and infers to the immortality of the soul in order to achieve or realize this purposefulness. Finally, the ontological proof notes that humans have a concept of the indestructibility of the soul, from which it infers (rather dubiously) that it must

³⁵ Carl Friedrich Bachmann, *Ueber Hegel's System und die Nothwendigkeit einer nochmaligen Umgestaltung der Philosophie*, Leipzig: Fr. Chr. Wilh. Vogel 1833, p. 309.

³⁶ Karl Rosenkranz, *Hegel. Sendschreiben an den Hofrath und Professor der Philosophie Herrn Dr. Carl Friedrich Bachmann in Jena*, Königsberg: August Wilhelm Unzer 1834.

³⁷ Rosenkranz, *Hegel*, pp. 128–30.

³⁸ Carl Friedrich Bachmann, *Anti-Hegel. Antwort an Herrn Professor Rosenkranz in Königsberg auf dessen Sendschreiben, nebst Bemerkungen zu der Recension meiner Schrift über Hegel's System in den Berliner Jahrbücher von Herrn Professor Hinrichs in Halle. Ein unentbehrliches Actenstück zu dem Process gegen die Hegel'sche Schule*, Jena: Cröker 1835, p. 137, pp. 166ff. Here the *Bemerkungen zu der Recension meiner Schrift über Hegel's System* appear at the end of the text in an independent section, pp. 173–98.

³⁹ Bachmann, *Anti-Hegel*, p. 167.

⁴⁰ Carl Friedrich Göschel, *Von den Beweisen für die Unsterblichkeit der menschlichen Seele im Lichte der spekulativen Philosophie, Eine Ostergabe*, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1835.

exist. The task of contemporary philosophy is then to grasp these proofs in a speculative manner. This entails recognizing that the first proof is based on the *self-consciousness* of the human soul (and its indivisibility), the second on the *consciousness* of God (and His purposefulness), and finally the third, which unites the first and the second, on the *self-conscious consciousness* of God. Thus, we have a speculative development which leads to the concept of immortality, indeed, to a proof of it. Göschel denies that he is distorting Hegel or attributing to him views unsupported by his texts.

In 1837 Kasimir Conradi (1784–1849) presented a work which attempted to construct a new theory of immortality based on Hegelian premises.⁴¹ Here one sees a shift in the defensive strategy. While Göschel was determined to demonstrate a textual basis for immortality in Hegel, Conradi recognized that one must rather construct such a theory in his name. The object was to answer the younger Fichte's charges that Hegel's philosophy, because of its secular character, was incapable of producing such a theory.

In Denmark an important article on this debate was published in 1837 by Søren Kierkegaard's teacher Poul Martin Møller (1794–1838), entitled, 'Thoughts on the Possibility of Proofs of Human Immortality, with Reference to the Most Recent Literature Belonging Thereto.'⁴² It has been claimed that Møller, who had previously been an advocate of Hegel's philosophy, makes his definitive break with Hegel with this work. He gives a detailed account of the discussions taking place in Germany and comes down squarely on the side of the critics. He regards Göschel's attempt to find a doctrine of immortality in Hegel's texts as wholly implausible: 'No informed Hegelian could possibly believe that such a church spire could fittingly be placed upon the Hegelian edifice without subjecting it to a thorough transformation.'⁴³ Interestingly, Kierkegaard himself had little to say about the issue of immortality and seems not to have a detailed doctrine of it.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Kasimir Conradi, *Unsterblichkeit und ewiges Leben: Versuch einer Entwicklung des Unsterblichkeitsbegriffs der menschlichen Seele*, Mainz: Kupferberg 1837.

⁴² Poul Martin Møller, 'Tanker over Muligheden af Beviser for Menneskets Udødelighed, med Hensyn til den nyeste derhen hørende Literatur,' *Maanedsskrift for Litteratur*, vol. 17, 1837, pp. 1–72, pp. 422–53. See Carl Henrik Koch, *Den danske idealisme 1800–1880*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2004, pp. 258–64; Jørgen K. Bukdahl, 'Poul Martin Møllers opgør med "nihilismen",' *Dansk Udsyn*, vol. 45, 1965, pp. 266–90; Jon Stewart, *A History of Hegelianism in Golden Age Denmark*, Tome II, *The Martensen Period: 1837–1842*, Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel 2007 (*Danish Golden Age Studies*, vol. 3), pp. 37–53.

⁴³ Møller, 'Tanker,' p. 450.

⁴⁴ See Gregor Malantschuk, 'The Problems of the Self and Immortality,' in his *Kierkegaard's Way to the Truth*, trans. by Mary Michelsen, Montreal: Inter Editions 1987, pp. 79–96. István Czákó, *Geist und Unsterblichkeit. Grundprobleme der Religionsphilosophie und Eschatologie im Denken Søren Kierkegaards*, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter 2014 (*Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series*, vol. 29). Lasse Horne Kjøldgaard, 'What It Means to Be Immortal: Afterlife and Aesthetic Communication in

Carl Ludwig Michelet (1801–93) continued in the spirit of Conradi in a series of lectures delivered at the University of Berlin in 1840 and published in 1841.⁴⁵ Michelet treats the issues of the personhood of God and the immortality of the soul as intimately related. He argues that human beings, as finite, necessarily participate in the divine, the infinite, and this participation implies a form of immortality. While Michelet makes his Hegelian affiliation clear, he presents the argument as his own and has little to say about Hegel's beliefs or writings. This debate would continue to rage for many years.

Hegel places special emphasis on the doctrine of immortality in his accounts of the different world religions. Indeed, a doctrine of immortality is one of the criteria that Hegel uses in order to determine the placement of the different religions in his overall taxonomy. He clearly believes that those peoples who have the most advanced conception of the divine also have a conception of immortality. Of supreme importance is that the notion of immortality presupposes a developed sense of subjective freedom. Hegel ranks the different world religions in his hierarchy in part in accordance with the degree to which they offer some form of a doctrine of immortality. The absence of a theory of immortality in Judaism presumably accounts in part for his uncertainty about where exactly to place it in his system. This doctrine is closely bound up with the doctrine of subjective freedom that he traces in his different lectures. The doctrine of immortality presupposes a conception of the self that is of significance. It presupposes an idea that there is something absolute and irreducible about the individual. But this is something that must be developed historically.

In his treatment of the Egyptian religion, Hegel is keen to laud the Egyptians as the first people to have had a clear doctrine of the immortality of the soul.⁴⁶ According to his view, the Egyptians, in contrast to the previous religions, had a developed sense of the self and of individuality that involved a degree of subjective freedom. This is evident in their belief that individuals will be judged for their moral worth after death and, if judged worthy, will enter into a special realm of the dead, Amenthes, where they will continue to exist. This indicates that individuals are valuable in themselves, and their actions are so important that they are of interest to the gods. Moreover, humans can be ascribed responsibility for their decisions, and thus there is an awareness that they have a degree of freedom.

Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2005, pp. 90–112. Tamara Monet Marks, 'Kierkegaard's New Argument for Immortality,' *Journal of Religious Ethics*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2010, pp. 143–86.

⁴⁵ Carl Ludwig Michelet, *Vorlesungen über die Persönlichkeit Gottes und Unsterblichkeit der Seele oder die ewige Persönlichkeit des Geistes*, Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler 1841.

⁴⁶ Hegel, *Phil. of Hist.*, p. 215; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 285. *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, p. 355; *Jub.*, vol. 12, p. 474. *Aesthetics*, vol. 2, p. 650; *Jub.*, vol. 13, p. 291. *Hist. of Phil.*, vol. 1, p. 233; *Jub.*, vol. 17, p. 286. *LPWH*, vol. 1, p. 347; *VPWG*, vol. 1, p. 284. *LPWH*, vol. 1, p. 360; *VPWG*, vol. 1, p. 301. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 627; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 520.

An analysis of Hegel's account of the determinate religion provides insight into why it was so difficult to discern whether he actually had a theory of immortality. Critics were looking for a clearly identifiable special section dedicated to the issue. But instead Hegel treats the belief in immortality in a number of different places in his lectures in the context of the different religions: magic,⁴⁷ the Chinese religion,⁴⁸ Buddhism,⁴⁹ Judaism,⁵⁰ the Greek religion,⁵¹ and of course the Egyptian religion. This belief is a part of the developing story of spirit that he is tracing. Given his positive statements about how the notion of immortality begins to develop in these other religions, it seems clear that this is a view that he in one way or another wishes to maintain. To deny it would mean to deny subjective freedom, which, he claims, is the goal of the development of human history. This account shows that his theory of immortality is part and parcel of his theory of the development of the human spirit, and thus is not designated explicitly as a theory of immortality.

Moreover, this shows that Hegel put great weight on personal immortality, that is, the survival of the individual. This is precisely why he praises the Egyptian religion and criticizes Hinduism, which has a version of immortality but one in which the individual melts into the whole of the universe. This is particularly important since it is often claimed that Hegel's view of immortality concerns the immortality of spirit, that is, the collective human mind, and not individuals. The key is the idea of an inner self or subjectivity. This is what must survive, and therefore the idea of a collective immortality cannot be correct.

Given this analysis, it seems absurd to deny that Hegel had a doctrine of immortality as some critics have traditionally done. There can be no doubt that immortality plays a central role in his diagnosis of the different world religions. Moreover, insofar as Christianity is for him the highest religion and it has a doctrine of immortality, it would seem that he is also committed to this doctrine in one form or another.

While there is no doubt that Hegel has a theory of immortality and that it is important for his treatment of the world religions, once again suspicion remains about whether this theory aligns with the Christian conception. What does he say concretely about the doctrine of immortality in his treatment of Christianity? At first glance this seems fairly straightforward. He emphasizes this dogma explicitly in a way that sounds reasonably orthodox:

The immortality of the soul becomes a specific doctrine of the Christian religion: the soul or singular subjectivity has an infinite, eternal vocation to be a citizen in

⁴⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 296–7; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 200–1.

⁴⁸ Hegel, *LPWH*, vol. 1, p. 361; *VPWG*, vol. 1, pp. 301–2.

⁴⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 568–70; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 465–7.

⁵⁰ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 160; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 65. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 685, note 492; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 577n.

⁵¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 166; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 72. *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 181; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 87.

the Kingdom of God. This is a vocation, a life, that is removed from time and temporality, [existing] for itself, and since it [is] also opposed to temporality, this eternal vocation is defined as a future of immortality.⁵²

Christianity has a developed sense of immortality since it reflects a developed sense of subjective freedom. Humans are created in God's image and share something divine with God, namely, spirit. The value of each human being is recognized as something absolute.

But when one looks closer, the matter becomes more complicated. In another passage Hegel seems to criticize the traditional conception of immortality and to present a different one.⁵³ There he indicates that immortality should not be conceived as a different state that occurs in some other place in the future, that is, after one's death or after the Second Coming. Instead, immortality or, as he puts it, eternity is simply spirit itself, specifically the ability to think the universal. So Hegel redefines the concept of immortality and eternity in a way that is far from intuitive. He claims that it is a mistake to think of eternal life simply in terms of temporal duration. There are many lower things such as rocks that endure for a long time, but this is a poor conception of immortality. Rather, humans share with God the quality of spirit, and spirit is the ability to rise above nature and to embrace the universal. This is what separates us from rocks and the animals and the rest of creation. While this view cannot be regarded as orthodox, there can be no doubt both that Hegel takes it to be a genuine theory of immortality and that this theory plays an important role in his understanding of Christianity.

He associates the idea of humans as free and as spirit with the idea of immortality; indeed, the notion of immortality consists precisely in this:

As this pure inward certainty of itself, it is formal subjectivity. To be sure, it is abstract—but it is abstract being-in-and-for-self. This comes forth in the shape that human being as spirit is *immortal*, the object of divine interest, elevated above finitude, dependence, and external conditions, [having] the freedom to abstract from everything. This implies that humanity is outside the range of mortality.⁵⁴

Hegel sums this up in a way that can leave no doubt whatsoever that, contra the left-Hegelian view, he has a notion of immortality that he takes to be important. But the interpretative problem involves the fact that this notion is rather counter-intuitive. The common-sense conception is that it means an eternal existence in a different place after one's death. But this is not the correct conception, according

⁵² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 138; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 73–4.

⁵³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 208; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 140. See also *LPE*, p. 125; *VBG*, p. 301.

⁵⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 208; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 140.

to Hegel. On the contrary, immortality involves our existence in the here and now: 'Hence the immortality of the soul must not be imagined as though it first emerges into actuality at some later time; rather it is a present quality. Spirit is eternal, and for this reason it is already present.'⁵⁵ So immortality on this view means the ability, by means of thought and reflection, to separate oneself from the contingencies of nature; but this is not something that is reserved for life in heaven or another sphere. Rather this is what humans as free, rational agents can do in mundane life: 'As pure knowing or as thinking, [spirit] has the universal for its object—this is eternity. Eternity is not mere duration but knowing—the knowing of what is eternal.'⁵⁶

Given this account, it is easy to see why there was controversy about this issue. While there can be no doubt that Hegel has a theory of immortality and that he takes it to be an important element in Christianity, his view is so far removed from the common one that he can be reproached for in the end having changed its meaning so radically as to undermine the very notion itself. But the key to unravelling this can be seen when one compares his account of Christianity with that of the other religions. While the other religions had a conception of human beings that was still in some way bound up with nature and subjected to it, only Christianity fully overcomes this: 'Hence the eternity of spirit is brought to consciousness at this point, in this cognition, in this very separation that has attained to the infinitude of being-for-self, which is no longer entangled in the natural, the contingent, and the external.'⁵⁷ The story of the Fall portrays human mortality as a consequence of the original sin; Adam and Eve in the Garden were immortal prior to eating from the tree of knowledge. But for Hegel, the situation is just the opposite: the immortality of humans comes precisely from their ability to rise above their natural elements and to gain new knowledge in the way that animals can do only to a very limited extent.

8.3 The Pantheism Debate or the Question of a Personal God

Another point of critical discussion was the nature of the divine in Hegel's system. Like the issue of immortality, the question of a personal God was a sensitive one. The elder Fichte had been dismissed from his position in Jena in 1799 for holding the purportedly atheistic view that the divine was nothing more than an abstract moral order of the world.⁵⁸ He had, it was claimed, reduced the self-conscious, loving God to a moral principle. Since Hegel associated the divine with the

⁵⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, pp. 208–9; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 140.

⁵⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 209; *VPR*, Part 3, pp. 140–1.

⁵⁷ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 209; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 141.

⁵⁸ For a useful translation of the primary texts, see *J. G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798–1800)*, ed. by Yolanda Estes and Curtis Bowman, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate 2010.

concept of Spirit and the Spirit of humanity developing in history, it was asserted that his view amounted to pantheism.⁵⁹ If God is merely the abstract moving principle in history and not the distinct, self-conscious entity of Christian orthodoxy, then every historical event and action is a manifestation of the divine. Hegel's interpretation of the Trinity as a reflection of the three aspects of the philosophical Concept—the universal, the particular, and the individual—was similarly criticized for being at odds with the traditional view of God as a genuinely personal divinity. Hegel's view was seen as reducing the divine to a mere structure or movement of thought, and concerns were voiced that it could open the door for more radical claims that God is simply a projection of the human imagination with no basis in an external reality.

This was already an issue during Hegel's lifetime. In 1823 the theologian Friedrich August Gottreu Tholuck, Hegel's colleague in Berlin, published *Die Lehre von der Sünde und vom Versöhner*.⁶⁰ This work takes the form of a dialogue between two interlocutors about different theological issues. At the end of the book there is a series of appendices which go into more detail about individual issues. In the second of these, Tholuck addresses the question of pantheism. While he does not mention Hegel by name, he alludes to his target when he writes, 'It is the newest direction of philosophy that an *idealist pantheism* is the only true philosophy.'⁶¹

Hegel attempted to refute the charge in the second, revised edition of the *Encyclopaedia* in 1827. His Preface contains a long footnote in which Tholuck is singled out for criticism.⁶² Hegel returns to this issue later in the work:

The mitigation of the reproach of atheism into that of pantheism has its ground therefore in the superficial idea to which this mildness has attenuated and emptied God. As the popular idea clings to its abstract universality, from which all divine quality is excluded, all definiteness is reduced to the non-divine, the secularity of things, thus remains in fixed undisturbed substantiality. On such a presupposition, even after philosophy has maintained God's absolute

⁵⁹ For this debate see Arthur Drews, *Die deutsche Spekulation seit Kant mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das Wesen des Absoluten und die Persönlichkeit Gottes*, vols 1–2, 2nd ed., Leipzig: Gustav Fock 1895. Carl Ludwig Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel*, vol. 2, pp. 645–8. Walter Jaeschke, *Hegel Handbuch. Leben-Werk-Schule*, pp. 505–12. Theodor Dieter, *Die Frage der Persönlichkeit Gottes*, Tübingen: Schnürle 1917. Wilhelm Stähler, 'Ueber die Frage nach der Persönlichkeit des Absoluten,' in his *Zur Unsterblichkeitsproblematik in Hegels Nachfolge*, pp. 17–18.

⁶⁰ August Tholuck, *Die Lehre von der Sünde und vom Versöhner, oder Die wahre Weihe des Zweiflers*, 3rd ed., Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes 1830 [1823], p. 193.

⁶¹ Tholuck, *Die Lehre von der Sünde und vom Versöhner*, p. 234.

⁶² Hegel, *Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*, Zweite Ausgabe, Heidelberg: August Oßwald 1827, p. XIIn. (EL, p. 8n; Jub. vol. 8, p. 12n.) Hegel takes up this discussion again in 1827 in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*; see LPR, vol. 1, pp. 374–8; VPR, Part 1, pp. 272–5. See Philip M. Merklinger, *Philosophy, Theology, and Hegel's Berlin Philosophy of Religion, 1821–1827*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1993, pp. 141–51.

universality and the consequent untruth of the being of external things, the hearer still clings to his belief that secular things retain their being and form all that is definite in the divine universality. He thus changes that universality into what he calls the pantheistic: *Everything is*—(empirical things, without distinction, whether higher or lower in the scale, *are*)—all possess substantiality; and so—thus he understands philosophy—each and every secular thing is God. It is only his own stupidity, and the falsifications due to such [a] misconception, which generate the illusion and the allegation of such pantheism.⁶³

Hegel thus argues that the charge of pantheism is based on a fundamental misconception of the nature of the divine, which results in part from nineteenth-century Romanticism's retreat into subjectivism. He argues that even what he regards as the crudest form of polytheism, Hinduism, is not a genuine pantheism that sees the divine in everything. Even it sees the divine only in a certain selection of things. In a polemical footnote, he dismisses Tholuck's capacity to investigate religion philosophically.⁶⁴

Despite Hegel's defence, the charge persisted. An anonymous work, entitled *Ueber die Hegelsche Lehre, oder: absolutes Wissen und moderner Pantheismus*, was published in 1829.⁶⁵ Johann Eduard Erdmann identifies the author of this work as one 'Hülsemann',⁶⁶ who is otherwise unknown. The charge of pantheism is only issued at the end of the work, when the author compares Hegel's philosophy with Spinoza's pantheism⁶⁷ and makes clear his opposition to Hegel,⁶⁸ who is alleged to undermine Christianity and devalue the Christian God. Hegel responded to this polemically in his joint review. Almost line by line Hegel responds to errors and absurdities in the work, apparently not taking the charge of pantheism very seriously, since it is never worked out meaningfully in the text he is criticizing.⁶⁹

I. H. Fichte was one of Hegel's main critics on this point. A text of 1832 declares his opposition to the unchristian nature of Hegel's philosophy.⁷⁰ He views Hegel's recent death as a 'turning point' in philosophy, a shift from pantheism to a true Christian philosophy. To underscore the contrast to pantheism, Fichte designated his own position, 'speculative theism'. Fichte's stated goal is to restore a personal

⁶³ Hegel, *Encyclopädie*, Zweite Ausgabe, § 573, p. 521. (*Phil. of Mind* § 573, p. 305; *Jub.* vol. 10, p. 462.) Translation modified. See also *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 374–80; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 272–77.

⁶⁴ Hegel, *Encyclopädie*. Zweite Ausgabe, § 573, p. 528n. (*Phil. of Mind* § 573, p. 310n; *Jub.* vol. 10, p. 468n.)

⁶⁵ Anonymous, *Ueber die Hegelsche Lehre, oder: absolutes Wissen und moderner Pantheismus*, Leipzig: Christian Ernst Kollmann 1829.

⁶⁶ Erdmann, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 2, p. 622, § 332.1.

⁶⁷ Anonymous, *Ueber die Hegelsche Lehre*, pp. 182ff.

⁶⁸ Anonymous, *Ueber die Hegelsche Lehre*, pp. 197ff.

⁶⁹ See Hegel, '1. Über die Hegelsche Lehre, oder: absolutes Wissen und moderner Pantheismus,' pp. 316ff.

⁷⁰ Immanuel Hermann Fichte, *Ueber Gegensatz, Wendepunkt und Ziel heutiger Philosophie*, vol. 1, Heidelberg: J. H. B. Mohr 1832.

God to philosophy, and in a later writing he continues to criticize Hegel's conception of the divine as an ongoing process.⁷¹

Christian Hermann Weisse, while closer to Hegel, also wished to avoid pantheistic errors.⁷² In 1833 Weisse published his *Die Idee der Gottheit*,⁷³ which was intended as part of an independent system of philosophy of religion, based, however, on Hegel's speculative methodology. The book contains three parts, on different conceptions of the divine: (1) the ontological concept or pantheism, (2) the cosmological concept or Deism, and (3) the teleological concept. The discussion of pantheism is intended to demonstrate the personhood of God,⁷⁴ but, far from being critical of Hegel, it often borrows from his works, particularly his 'Lectures on the Proofs of the Existence of God'.

The above-mentioned C. F. Bachmann also takes up this issue,⁷⁵ criticizing Hegel's doctrine of the Trinity as an empty formalism that has nothing to do with the view presented in the New Testament.⁷⁶ Rosenkranz's counterattack accused Bachmann of failing to understand Hegel's speculative philosophy and of remaining stuck at a previous stage of philosophical development, under the influence of Jacobi's Deism.⁷⁷ In *Anti-Hegel*, Bachmann violently rejected the charge of being a deist.⁷⁸ He insists that he is a theist who believes in the personhood of God and claims that his sole goal is to combat Hegel's conception of the deity as a mere concept. As he sees it, Hegel's view leads to the absurd result that the apostles failed to conceive the divine adequately since they did not understand it speculatively.⁷⁹

In 1834 Carl August Eschenmayer (1768–1852) made the provocative suggestion that Hegel denies Christ's claim to be the truth and has placed his own philosophy higher than the Christian Revelation.⁸⁰ Hegel wishes 'to regard the appearance of the divine on the earth as an act of the human development of reason'.⁸¹ Eschenmayer proposes to test Hegel's claim that his philosophy contains the Christian principle of the gospels and demonstrates it conceptually. The work proceeds by critically analysing individual passages from Hegel's texts in detail. Eschenmayer emphatically rejects Hegel's concept of God, arguing, for

⁷¹ Immanuel Hermann Fichte, *Die Idee der Persönlichkeit und der individuellen Fortdauer*, Elberfeld: Büschler 1834, pp. 35ff.

⁷² Christian Hermann Weisse, *Ueber das Verhältniß des Publicums zur Philosophie in dem Zeitpunkte von Hegel's Abscheiden*, Leipzig: Schaarschmidt und Volckmar 1832, pp. 34–41.

⁷³ Christian Hermann Weisse, *Die Idee der Gottheit. Eine philosophische Abhandlung. Als wissenschaftliche Grundlegung zur Philosophie der Religion*, Dresden: Ch. F. Grimmer 1833.

⁷⁴ E.g. Weisse, *Die Idee der Gottheit*, pp. 121–38, pp. 196–33.

⁷⁵ Bachmann, *Ueber Hegel's System*, pp. 282–3.

⁷⁶ Bachmann, *Ueber Hegel's System*, pp. 297–310.

⁷⁷ Rosenkranz, *Hegel. Sendschreiben*, pp. 123–4.

⁷⁸ Bachmann, *Anti-Hegel*, pp. 161–2.

⁷⁹ Bachmann, *Anti-Hegel*, p. 162.

⁸⁰ Carl August Eschenmayer, *Die Hegelsche Religions-Philosophie verglichen mit dem christlichen Princip*, Tübingen: Heinrich Laupp 1834.

⁸¹ Eschenmayer, *Die Hegelsche Religions-Philosophie verglichen mit dem christlichen Princip*, p. iv.

example, 'God is not an idea, which a philosopher can set up in his circle of speculation.'⁸² On the contrary, the God of the Bible is a self-conscious being. He claims, 'The eternal God can never be captured in a process.'⁸³ The biblical deity is eternal and not in a process of development in the way Hegel's speculative Idea develops through history. Hence, Eschenmayer concludes, Hegel's philosophy is inconsistent with Christianity.

The Tübingen theologian, Ferdinand Christian Baur joined the fray with his *Die christliche Gnosis* of 1835.⁸⁴ This work contends that Hegel has been misrepresented by his critics and defends him against the charge of pantheism. It is the nature of the divine to reveal itself and to come to consciousness in finite human consciousness. But critics who assume that this leads to the belief that no divine consciousness can exist independently of human consciousness misunderstand the doctrine of immanence.⁸⁵ Baur writes: 'What is the fiercely criticized and often misinterpreted assertion that God, as Spirit, is only for Spirit, if not the indisputable claim that God sees himself in all spirits, that the collectivity of finite spirits is the self-conscious reflection of the divine being opened up to them and reflected in them, that God in this sense is everything in everything? This alone is the true concept of the immanence of God in the world.'⁸⁶

In his 1837 work, *Die Philosophie unserer Zeit*, Julius Schaller (1807–68), a *Privatdozent* in philosophy at Halle, offers a defence of Hegel against a number of criticisms, especially of pantheism, and insists that the Hegelian conception of the divine is consistent with the Christian God.⁸⁷ He surveys different accounts of the doctrine of personality—including that of I. H. Fichte—and tries to demonstrate the comparative strength of Hegel's position. He attempts to refute two recurring criticisms: (1) that conceiving of God as the development of the self-consciousness of humanity through history precludes conceiving of Him as an independent being, and (2) that the person of God amounts simply to the consciousness and knowledge of Him in the minds of human beings, and that God is thus immanent to human consciousness and not a transcendent entity.⁸⁸ Schaller defends Hegel by explaining the logic of opposites upon which Hegel's conception of the divine is based. God is only a creator since He created the world and thus stands in opposition to it. Similarly, God is only a person in opposition to other self-conscious agents, that is, human beings.

⁸² Eschenmayer, *Die Hegelsche Religions-Philosophie verglichen mit dem christlichen Princip*, § 152, p. 125.

⁸³ Eschenmayer, *Die Hegelsche Religions-Philosophie verglichen mit dem christlichen Princip*, § 152, p. 126.

⁸⁴ Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Tübingen: C. F. Osiander 1835.

⁸⁵ Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis*, pp. 704–5.

⁸⁶ Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis*, p. 706.

⁸⁷ Julius Schaller, *Die Philosophie unserer Zeit. Zur Apologie und Erläuterung des Hegelschen Systems*, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs 1837, pp. 268–323.

⁸⁸ Schaller, *Die Philosophie unserer Zeit*, pp. 293ff.

In 1838, Michelet gave a brief overview of these debates.⁸⁹ He agrees with Schaller and Göschel that Hegel's system does include a personal deity, but believes this has been misunderstood as requiring a transcendent being. It refers instead to the principle of personality itself. He writes:

Hegel's true doctrine of the personhood of God is not that God is one person among other persons; and likewise he is not merely universal substance. He is the eternal movement of the universal constantly making itself into a subject, which only in the subject comes to objectivity and true existence, and thus sublates the subject in its abstract being-for-itself. God is thus, according to Hegel, not a person but rather personhood itself.⁹⁰

Michelet thus seems to agree with Baur, whom he quotes directly, that the proper Hegelian conception is that of an immanent deity. He is therefore critical of the Hegelians who posit a supernatural God in a transcendent realm.

Carl Philipp Fischer's (1807–85) *Die Idee der Gottheit*, published in 1839, takes Hegel's philosophy of immanence to exclude the possibility of any independent external God. Hegel's pantheism, the author argues, consists in the unity of God and the world:

That the substance of God and the world is one and the same and that therefore God as a self-knowing spiritual substance is world spirit thought in its truth, while self-conscious individuals are not self-grounded and closed subjects, and thus eternal spirits, but rather accidental and thus disappearing figures of the One and the universal substance—Hegelian pantheism asserts this just like Spinozist pantheism, albeit in the former the subjective version of the absolute predominates and in the latter the objective version.⁹¹

He continues, 'As long as the essence of God and the world are thought to be identical, the personhood of God, the absolute unity of his inner being, will and spirit cannot be grasped.'⁹² Although Fischer accuses Hegel of pantheism, he is positively inclined towards his speculative methodology and employs it in his own theistic philosophy, which attempts to maintain the unity and personhood of God.

Michelet takes up this issue again in his aforementioned *Vorlesungen über die Persönlichkeit Gottes*, where he presents the doctrine of the divine personality and

⁸⁹ Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel*, vol. 2, pp. 645–8.

⁹⁰ Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel*, vol. 2, p. 646.

⁹¹ Carl Philipp Fischer, *Die Idee der Gottheit. Ein Versuch, den Theismus speculativ zu begründen und zu entwickeln*, Stuttgart: S. G. Liesching 1839, p. x.

⁹² Fischer, *Die Idee der Gottheit*, pp. x f.

surveys objections to it. He argues that in order to maintain the personhood of God, one must conceive the divine as being a dynamic process. A purely static transcendent deity resembles an object rather than a conscious entity.⁹³ He sketches the development of Spirit towards freedom in order to argue that, when correctly understood, this constitutes a developing, self-conscious being.⁹⁴ This culminates in Christianity, where individuals recognize themselves in the divinity incarnate and thus develop a new consciousness of the divine. In his defence of this doctrine, Michelet rejects the anthropomorphic conceptions of God, which he believes lie behind the criticisms. Further, he tries to make a case for a Christian doctrine of continuous creation that would bring it in line with Hegel's conception of a developing deity.⁹⁵

A final work worthy of note is Bruno Bauer's anonymous *Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts*, of 1841.⁹⁶ This work is difficult to classify since it does not fall cleanly into any one of the debates we are tracing. It is written ironically from the perspective of a reactionary pietist, outraged by Hegel's philosophy of religion. (As has been noted,⁹⁷ the irony of this is profound, since Bauer himself had collaborated with Marheineke in editing the second edition of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.) Bauer's intent was to discredit the uninformed criticisms of Hegel from the pietist camp by presenting a caricature of their position. The work contains a criticism of Hegel's concept of world spirit, which can be seen as continuous with the other criticisms we have been following concerning Hegel's conception of the divine.⁹⁸

Hegel repeatedly denied the charge of pantheism and explored in some detail the different conceptions behind the notion. But despite his denials, the suspicion remained primarily due to his extensive use of the term 'spirit', which was invariably interpreted as world spirit or the spirit of history. These criticisms, however, failed to recognize that one of the things that Hegel liked most about this term was its ambiguity. While it can mean something collective such as world spirit or the spirit of a people, it can also mean something individual. This is made perfectly clear in the *Encyclopedia*, where Hegel distinguishes between subjective spirit, objective spirit, and absolute spirit. So while it is true that he does have a conception of the collective human mind in terms of history or different elements

⁹³ Carl Ludwig Michelet, *Vorlesungen über die Persönlichkeit Gottes und Unsterblichkeit der Seele oder die ewige Persönlichkeit des Geistes*, Berlin: Ferdinand Dümmler 1841, pp. 223–4.

⁹⁴ Michelet, *Vorlesungen über die Persönlichkeit Gottes*, pp. 248ff.

⁹⁵ Michelet, *Vorlesungen über die Persönlichkeit Gottes*, pp. 272ff.

⁹⁶ [Bruno Bauer], *Die Posaune des jüngsten Gerichts über Hegel den Atheisten und Antichristen. Ein Ultimatum*, Leipzig: Otto Wigand 1841. (English translation: *The Trumpet of the Last Judgement against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist: An Ultimatum*, trans. by Laurence Stepelevich, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press 1989.) For an account of this text, see Douglas Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 99–118.

⁹⁷ Moggach, *The Philosophy and Politics of Bruno Bauer*, p. 100.

⁹⁸ [Bruno Bauer], *Die Posaune*, pp. 67–70; *The Trumpet of the Last Judgement against Hegel the Atheist and Antichrist: An Ultimatum*, pp. 113–16.

of human culture such as art, religion, and philosophy, this does not undermine the legitimacy of the individual as spirit.

Given the confusion about the term 'spirit' and the immediate association with something general, it might be argued that the emphasis on Hegel's treatment of the history of the world religions only exacerbated this problem. Given that Hegel conceives of the divine as a changing concept that begins in the earliest religions and develops into higher forms through the course of history, this would seem to imply that, according to his view, God is simply a developing idea and not a personal deity. But this objection fails to understand the structure and strategy of Hegel's lectures. As was noted, he organized his lectures in terms of the Concept, that is, the speculative triad. At first he explores the universal, that is, the idea of God in Part 1, 'The Concept of Religion', and then he explores the particulars, that is, the world religions in Part 2, 'The Determinate Religion', and then finally, he treats the unity of the universal and the particular in Part 3 with Christianity. In Part 1, he explores the general concept of God in abstraction from any concrete historical religion, and here he presents his idea of God as spirit.⁹⁹ In this context it is clear that Hegel has in mind a self-conscious divinity as the true concept of God.

Moreover, the subsequent development of his lectures makes this even more evident. The development of the world religions, according to Hegel, moves from nature to spirit. In other words, the conception of the divine begins with objects of nature and works its way up towards ever-more satisfying views of a self-conscious subject. For this reason he places the religions of spirit higher than those of nature. The deities of the religions of spirit reflect the level of the subjective freedom of the peoples who believe in them. Hegel's accounts of the religions of nature make it clear that he is highly critical of conceptions of the divine as objects of nature, plants, animals, etc. This is one of his main reproaches of Hinduism and the zoolatry of the ancient Egyptians. He refers to Hinduism with a derogatory tone as 'the religion of fantasy' since it conceives of so many objects of nature as divinities. Only a self-conscious deity is worthy of a free people.

In the course of his analysis of the religions of the world Hegel on several occasions criticizes what he takes to be the overly abstract conceptions of the divine. For example, as we saw in the previous chapter, this is one of his main objections to Islam. He also mentions explicitly the abstract God of Deism. The point of these criticisms is that an abstract God cannot be a God of spirit since such a God must become concrete. This is what happens with the Christian Revelation. This shows that God is a self-conscious singular entity and not an abstraction.

His theory of recognition implies a reciprocal relation between a people and its divinities. In his account of Judaism, Hegel was critical of the Jewish conception of

⁹⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, pp. 366–80; *VPR*, Part 1, pp. 266–77.

the divine, which seemed to undermine the freedom of the believers by being a tyrannical master instead of a loving God, who ascribes freedom to the other. This kind of reciprocal relation of recognition implies a specific other to give and receive recognition. This conception would clearly undermine any notion of a pantheistic god, which presumably would not be able to give or receive recognition since it is not a singular, self-conscious entity.

Similarly Hegel's focus on the importance of Christ as the revealed God also undermines the notion of pantheism. Christ is a specific, concrete singular person, conceived as divine by Christianity. This alone seems to speak against the conception of a pantheist God. The role of Christ then leads to the third of the traditional debates about the reception of Hegel's philosophy of religion, namely, the question of the divinity of Christ.

8.4 The Debate about Christology

Related to the question of the personhood of God, the issue of the nature of Christ also became a key point of contention.¹⁰⁰ Since Hegel's accounts of Christ in 'The Positivity of the Christian Religion' and 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate' were not known at the time, the debates concerned primarily his statements about Jesus in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. According to one interpretation, Hegel viewed Christ as a representative of the highest ethical standpoint that human beings can attain. Thus, Jesus represented in some sense the divinity in humanity as a whole. But this conception seems to undermine the view that Christ was himself uniquely divine. Again, the concern was that a key point in orthodox dogmatics was being replaced with a secular view.

The debate about Christology centred on the work of David Friedrich Strauss. The publication of his *The Life of Jesus* in two volumes in 1835–36,¹⁰¹ signalled the beginning of a major controversy that cost him his position and defined his life forever after. This work applied a critical-historical method to the gospels in order to examine their accounts of Christ. In his analysis Strauss concludes again and again that the miracles attributed to Christ were merely the fabrications of believers after the fact. These stories about the life and works of Christ are merely the shared folklore of the religious community at an early stage of the Christian religion. Such beliefs are time-bound products of the age and circumstances in which they were born. Thus, to understand them, one must first understand the historical development of the religion.

¹⁰⁰ See Michelet, *Geschichte der letzten Systeme der Philosophie in Deutschland von Kant bis Hegel*, vol. 2, pp. 648–59. Erdmann, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 2, pp. 654–60. Toews, *Hegelianism*, pp. 165–75, pp. 255–87. Brazill, *The Young Hegelians*, pp. 95–132.

¹⁰¹ Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu*.

Strauss regarded his work as a combination of critical-historical Biblical exegesis and speculative philosophy. First, he took seriously the immanentism attributed to Hegel, which precluded the possibility of any supernatural dimension required for miracles. Second, the critical method was used to identify and eliminate the mythical elements of Christianity so that only its metaphysical or philosophical truth remains. This approach was then thought to be in line with Hegel's claim that philosophical knowing is higher than religious knowing and encompasses it. Third, Strauss shared Hegel's belief that the goal of philosophy was to reconcile and overcome alienation. Christ's message of the unity of the human and the divine thus superseded the Judaic conception of God as absolutely other. For Strauss, this unity and reconciliation were conceived not in terms of a single person, Christ, but in terms of all humanity. Unfortunately, he writes, the believers have reintroduced this alienation by confining the reconciliation to a single person. The goal now is to overcome alienation by grasping God and humanity as complementary dialectical concepts. God's essence is defined in contrast to humanity, and humanity in contrast to God. Although Strauss' goal was to demonstrate the truth of Christianity, it was perceived as an attempt to undermine the authority of the scriptures and the religious belief based on them. It was criticized by defenders of Hegel who wanted to uphold orthodoxy. They took the book to be a radical departure from Hegel's conservative intentions with respect to the divinity of Christ. But it was also criticized by those opposed to orthodox Hegelianism, who saw it as confirming their suspicions of the dangerously secular consequences of Hegel's philosophy. In the following years, Strauss issued revised editions of the book to meet the many criticisms raised against it.

Strauss' teacher, the aforementioned Ferdinand Christian Baur, argues in his *Die christliche Gnosis* that, according to Hegel, Christ is not himself uniquely divine but that there is a unity of divine and human at the level of humanity generally.¹⁰² Baur claims: 'For faith the appearance of the God-man, the becoming-human of God, His birth in the flesh, may well be a historical fact, but at the standpoint of speculative thinking the becoming-human of God is no individual, unique, historical fact but rather an eternal determination of the essence of God.'¹⁰³ Baur explains:

The reconciliation brought about by Christ is not a temporal event. Rather God eternally reconciles himself with himself, and the resurrection and raising of Christ is nothing other than the eternal return of Spirit to itself and to its truth.

¹⁰² Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Tübingen: C. F. Osiander 1835, pp. 707ff.

¹⁰³ Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, p. 715.

Christ as human being, as God-man, is the human being in his universality, not as in a particular individual but rather as the universal individual.¹⁰⁴

Baur thus seems to argue that there is a higher and deeper meaning to what are normally taken to be the historical events surrounding the life of Jesus. This deeper meaning concerns the universal truth that these historical events represent. This work focuses on Hegel's texts and does not engage in polemics either for or against Strauss' position.

In 1835 the Tübingen theologian, Johann Christian Friedrich Steudel (1779–1837), defended the supernatural nature of Christ in opposition to Strauss' claims.¹⁰⁵ By appealing to the inner conviction of the believer regardless of the historical record, he effectively reduced the supernatural nature of Christ to the subjective conviction of the individual. Gottlieb Christoph Adolf von Harless (1806–79) presents a detailed overview of the debates surrounding Strauss' book,¹⁰⁶ after which the author moralistically dismisses Strauss' work, in favour of supernaturalism. One of Strauss' former instructors in Tübingen, the above-mentioned Carl August Eschenmayer, vehemently denounced *The Life of Jesus*.¹⁰⁷ He portrays Strauss as a modern Judas, who betrayed Christianity and wilfully profaned the doctrine of the Revelation. This work vividly shows the kind of passions that Strauss' book evoked.

A posthumously published work by Christoph Benjamin Klaiber (1796–1836) argues against Strauss' methodology, claiming that by considering Christ's life and works episodically, Strauss had lost sight of the broader picture of Christ as a whole. Klaiber defends the miracles and supernatural elements of Christ, which are possible since God, as the fundamental ground (*Urgrund*) of the world and of nature, can perform miraculous acts which contradict natural laws. Klaiber regards Strauss as an inevitable product of the Hegelian system, which undermines the credibility of the gospels.¹⁰⁸ Examining Strauss' methodology in an 1837 work, Tholuck too criticizes his conclusions and repeats his attack on Hegel's purported pantheism.¹⁰⁹ He attempts to defend the historical veracity of the gospels by analysing the biblical texts in detail.

¹⁰⁴ Baur, *Die christliche Gnosis oder die christliche Religions-Philosophie in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, p. 715.

¹⁰⁵ Johann Christian Friedrich Steudel, *Vorläufig zu Beherzigendes bei Würdigung der Frage über die historische oder mythische Grundlage des Lebens Jesu, wie die kanonischen Evangelien dieses darstellen u.s.w.*, Tübingen: Fues 1835.

¹⁰⁶ Gottlieb Christoph Adolph Harless, *Die kritische Bearbeitung des Leben Jesu von Dr. Dav. Friedr. Strauß nach ihrem wissenschaftlichen Werthe beleuchtet*, Erlangen: C. Heyder 1835.

¹⁰⁷ Carl August Eschenmayer, *Der Ischariotismus unserer Tage. Eine Zugabe zu dem jüngst erscheinen Werke: Das Leben Jesu, von Strauß*, Tübingen: Fues 1835.

¹⁰⁸ Christoph Benjamin Klaiber, *Bemerkungen über 'das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet von Dr. Fr. Strauß'*, Stuttgart: Beck & Fränkel 1836, pp. 70–88.

¹⁰⁹ August Tholuck, *Die Glaubwürdigkeit der evangelischen Geschichte, zugleich eine Kritik des Lebens Jesu von Strauß, für theologische und nicht theologische Leser dargestellt*, Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes 1836, pp. 7–8.

The theologian Johann Peter Lange (1802–84) offers a compromise solution to the conflict,¹¹⁰ employing the speculative method to mediate between the mythological standpoint and the historical one. Neither history nor mythology, the gospels represent a higher position which contains all previous mythology. They bring together the many diverse mythological elements found in paganism and other religions and express them in a higher form. Wilhelm Hoffmann (1806–73) also argues for a supernaturalist position and defends miracles, while simultaneously claiming to be sympathetic to speculative philosophy.¹¹¹ He too represents a conciliatory position, wanting to use speculative methods to understand the nature and significance of Christ. He argues that if the unity of the human and the divine is conceived to be in the spirit of humanity generally, it cannot be realized in any given person and remains an abstract idea without reality.

In the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik* of 1837 Bruno Bauer published a joint review of ten different works that criticized *The Life of Jesus* (including several of those noted above).¹¹² Bauer makes no obvious attempt either to defend or criticize Strauss. He objectively examines each of the works in question, noting strengths and weaknesses, but is dismissive of what he takes to be naïve supernaturalist criticisms.

In 1837 Strauss responded to his critics in his *Streitschriften*,¹¹³ the work in which he coins the terms 'right' and 'left' Hegelianism. Since he had been criticized by those Hegelians who wished to see Hegel's philosophy as consistent with Christianity, Strauss begins with an account of his relation to Hegel's philosophy. He explains that Hegel's distinction between representation and concept was his point of departure. When he applied this distinction to Biblical studies, this meant that his goal was to separate truth from myth by purging the biblical texts of their purely representational elements to reveal their conceptual core. He argues that his purported Hegelian critics have betrayed the basic principle of Hegel's philosophy: reaching the truth by means of critical reflection and mediation. The stage of immediacy or immediate faith must be overcome just as sense certainty is overcome in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.¹¹⁴ Strauss further argues that his conception of the unity of the divine and the human in humanity is in fact Hegel's position.¹¹⁵ He grants that this unity is made possible by Christ who

¹¹⁰ Johann Peter Lange, *Ueber den geschichtlichen Charakter der kanonischen Evangelien, insbesondere der Kindheitsgeschichte Jesu mit Beziehung auf 'das Leben Jesu von Strauß'*, Duisburg: C. H. Schmachtenberg 1836.

¹¹¹ Wilhelm Hoffmann, *Das Leben Jesu, kritisch bearbeitet von Dr. D. F. Strauss. Geprüft für Theologen und Nichttheologen*, Stuttgart: P. Balz 1836.

¹¹² Bruno Bauer, Review of writings on Strauss by Steudel, Klaiber, Hoffmann, Lange, Harless, Sack, Baader and Eschenmayer, in *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik*, March 1837, no. 41, pp. 321–8; no. 42, pp. 329–36, no. 43, pp. 337–43. (As was customary, the title of the review was simply the titles of the books under examination.)

¹¹³ Strauss, *Streitschriften*, pp. 95–126; *Defense*, pp. 38–66.

¹¹⁴ Strauss, *Streitschriften*, pp. 67–8; *Defense*, pp. 13–14.

¹¹⁵ Strauss, *Streitschriften*, pp. 76ff.; *Defense*, pp. 21ff.

represents the historical occasion which brought this truth to consciousness, but the unity itself is universal.

Göschel responded to Strauss in 1838,¹¹⁶ in a work apparently written at the behest of the Prussian minister of education, Karl von Altenstein (1770–1840), who wished to curb the influence of the perceived secularizing Hegelians.¹¹⁷ The text is divided into three chapters. In the first of these, 'God, Christ and Man', Göschel defends Hegel's philosophy against the criticisms raised in response to the works of Hegelians like Richter and Strauss. Their texts brought Hegel's philosophy into disrepute by seeming to confirm the suspicions of many outside observers, who were convinced that Hegel's philosophy led to atheism and secularism. Göschel's goal is to correct this impression. He is thus not primarily interested in criticizing Strauss, but rather in defending Hegel against critics who take Strauss' position to be Hegel's or, at least, its natural consequence. He tries to answer the charge that Hegel's understanding of the orthodox doctrines of the Trinity, Revelation, justification, original sin, and the God-man is unchristian and merely adapts religious language to its own purposes. When he comes to treating Strauss' views, Göschel is particularly keen to refute the claim that Christ is simply a symbol for the unity of the divine and human in all humanity.¹¹⁸ This, the central issue of the first chapter of the book, is given a detailed treatment, which includes an overview of the medieval controversy about universals.

This debate generated a tremendous amount of literature, of which we can only give an inkling here. Most importantly, it was specifically in the context of this discussion that the distinction between right and left Hegelianism arose. However, it remains to be seen how adequate these distinctions are for capturing the content of these debates. With regard to this issue of the nature of Christ, it can be said that the entire force and trajectory of Hegel's historical overview of the world's religions point in one direction: he wants to vindicate the truth of Christianity vis-à-vis other religions. By tracing the movement from nature to spirit, he wishes to show the inferiority of the gods of nature. Also by tracing the movement of the different conceptions of the divine in the religions of spirit, he shows how each of them fails to grasp fully the divine as human. There is always some element that is not entirely human: the Greeks shape their gods from marble or stone, and the Jews conceive of their god as abstract. Only in Christianity is it man as man, who is considered divine. Only with a human divinity can human beings realize that the divine is in everyone. Given the detailed historical account that Hegel sketches, there can be no doubt that the person of Christ as a divinity is an absolutely

¹¹⁶ Carl Friedrich Göschel, *Beiträge zur spekulativen Philosophie von Gott und dem Menschen und von dem Gott-Menschen. Mit Rücksicht auf Dr. D.F. Strauss' Christologie*, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1838.

¹¹⁷ See Walter Jaeschke, 'Urmenschheit und Monarchie: Eine politische Christologie der Hegelschen Rechten,' *Hegel-Studien*, vol. 14, 1979, pp. 73–107; pp. 83ff.

¹¹⁸ Göschel, *Beiträge zur spekulativen Philosophie*, pp. 53ff.

essential aspect of his view of the superiority of Christianity over the other world religions.

Hegel places great emphasis on the Trinity since this is the key Christian doctrine which reflects the philosophical triad of the Concept: universality, particularity, and individuality. It represents a deity that develops in time in a speculative manner. It is this doctrine, among other things, that fundamentally distinguishes Christianity from the religions of Spirit. Moreover, it is with this doctrine that Christianity is able to move past the abstraction that Judaism and Islam are caught in. Christianity is both abstract and concrete, with each of these elements having a dialectical relation to the other. Given his emphasis on the Trinity as the defining aspect of Christianity, it seems inescapable that, for Hegel, Christ, as a member of the Trinity, must be regarded as divine.

One of the reasons for the confusion on this issue is that Hegel is critical of the view that isolates Christ from his role in the Trinity and focuses exclusively on him as a divinity. Hegel takes this to be an error since the point of Christ's death and resurrection is that he should not be worshipped as a divinity in his own life but only after his death. It is the spirit of Christ in the Holy Spirit that is the divine:

In this connection the Christian religion might occur to us, which does not worship God under the image of a man, but rather worships *in* this man the *actuality* of God (α) It must be mentioned in the first place that by virtue of his human nature the God who is worshiped is deceased: Christ did not allow himself to be worshiped as God during his lifetime. (β) Thus the truth is rather that, just as the Christian religion is the most spiritual, so a religion that worships God in a living person is the most spiritless, the most unspiritual, the most vulgar.¹¹⁹

The divinity of Christ is found in the Holy Spirit. What the life of Christ has taught is that the human is divine and that humans share spirit with the divine.

At the time it was common to compare Christ with Socrates as a moral teacher.¹²⁰ Hegel takes this as typical of the spirit of the age which attempts to extract the religious elements from the key dogmas and to explain them in ways that do not contradict our common understanding of how nature works. Thus Hegel explicitly distinguishes the two since Christ is the revelation of God, whereas Socrates is simply a moral man.¹²¹ Similarly, he rejects the conception of Christ in Islam as simply a human prophet.¹²² Since he is critical of these views,

¹¹⁹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 107; *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 13–14.

¹²⁰ See, for example, Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Das Christliche des Platonismus oder Sokrates und Christus. Eine religionsphilosophische Untersuchung*, Tübingen: Ludw. Friedr. Fues 1837.

¹²¹ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 244, note 215; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 173n. *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 316; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 240. *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 321, note 196; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 244n.

¹²² Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 244, note 215; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 173n. *LPR*, vol. 3, p. 316; *VPR*, Part 3, p. 240.

it would be absurd to ascribe the same idea to him. In these cases, he explicitly underlines the importance of seeing Christ as divine since a part of the point of the Incarnation is to overcome the abstraction of God in the beyond or transcendent sphere.

Finally, Hegel raises the question of whether Jesus of Nazareth was truly the Son of God. He notes that it was common for the Jews to expect a new messiah and, as we have seen in Chapter 5 above, for the pagans to deify living individuals, such as Hercules or the Roman emperors.¹²³ But he then claims explicitly, that despite this, only Christ was the truly divine human being. He points out that the persons of the hero Hercules or the Roman emperors fall short of the concept of the divine. Here again it is highly useful to compare his analysis of Christianity with his analyses of the other religions since this allows one to appreciate his defence of the former and to clarify some of the key interpretative issues that have been troublesome in his lectures.

8.5 Reflections on the Traditional Designations

Although the labels 'Hegelian' and 'Hegel critic' or 'right Hegelian' and 'left Hegelian' have been applied across the board by historians of philosophy, the actual character and nature of these debates were too differentiated and heterogeneous to be adequately described by them, as the foregoing discussion indicates. First, the distinction between right and left Hegelianism is far from adequate to capture the main lines of the debate on immortality. According to the reductionist use of Strauss' categories, Feuerbach and Richter would figure among the left Hegelians; however, their positions differ radically. While Richter argues that Hegel has no doctrine of immortality and on this point his philosophy should be conceived as critical of Christianity, Feuerbach seems indifferent to Hegel's own view on the matter. Moreover, instead of repudiating the belief in immortality, as one might expect of a left Hegelian, Feuerbach claims to be giving a correct interpretation of it.

According to the traditional view, Marheineke, Weisse, Göschel, Rosenkranz, Conradi, and Michelet all belong to the right Hegelian camp; however, here as well there are significant differences. While Marheineke and Michelet argue for a Christian account of immortality, they are not particularly interested in attributing this view to Hegel. By contrast, their purported fellow right Hegelians Weisse, Rosenkranz, and Göschel argue explicitly that Hegel does in fact have a doctrine of immortality, or at least the basis for one, and that it is consistent with orthodox Christian doctrine. Conradi also proves to be problematic to categorize according

¹²³ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, pp. 467f. *VPR*, Part 2, pp. 367f.

to the traditional scheme since he agrees with the left Hegelians that there is no doctrine of immortality in Hegel's texts; however, he looks like a right Hegelian with his claim that one can reconstruct a doctrine on Hegel's behalf based on the general principles of his thought.

Finally, according to the traditional division, the Hegel critics would represent an entirely separate group distinct from either the right or the left school. However, here a closer look reveals that the critics, Schubarth, I. H. Fichte, Bachmann, and Møller, in fact are in agreement with those on the Hegelian left who hold that Hegel has no doctrine of immortality. The difference lies not in their interpretation of this question but rather in their assessment of the omission. While so-called left Hegelians regarded it as an intellectual advance, these Hegel critics regarded it as a shortcoming. But the categorical lines are blurred, since on the key issue thought to define one's affiliation, that is, whether or not Hegel held such a view, at least some Hegel advocates and some Hegel critics are in agreement.

Also in the discussion about pantheism too, the simple categories of right and left are inadequate to capture the complexity of the issue. One oddity about this discussion is the absence of the left Hegelians. While in the previous debate the left Hegelians could claim that Hegel had no doctrine of immortality and regard this as a good thing, here no one typically associated with the 'left' seems to have been interested in affirming that Hegel was a pantheist and embracing this doctrine. Thus, the debate was carried out more or less wholly by the 'right' Hegelians who insisted that Hegel in fact had a personal God, and by the Hegel critics who denied this and charged him with pantheism. Here again one can see that the traditional categories do not map evenly onto each of the discussions.

While Michelet is generally regarded as a right Hegelian, it is far from clear how his re-interpretation of the personhood of God as personhood itself can be reconciled with orthodox Christian dogma. The position he propounds appears dangerously close to the view that was so violently attacked as pantheistic. The charge of dissemblance or inauthenticity that Hegel was often confronted with on this issue might well apply here too. One could argue that Michelet's position amounts to an affirmation that Hegel was a pantheist and represents a positive assessment of this position. However, this would in effect amount to the missing *left* Hegelian position in the debate, corresponding to the left Hegelian position in the debate about immortality. Thus, the categorization of the right Hegelian Michelet is rendered highly problematic.

Moreover, many of the books and articles in this discussion were not primarily interested in adjudicating the question of whether or not Hegel had a conception of a personal deity. Rather they represent original contributions to a general philosophical and theological discussion about this issue. The discussion cannot rightly be deemed as one limited to something within the Hegelian school since, often, no attempt is made to criticize or defend Hegel's position on the topic. In short, the general discussion is larger than its Hegelian dimension.

With respect to the debate about Christology, the decisive question for Strauss was whether or not one needed to invoke the divinity of Christ to demonstrate the truth of the gospel history. His own denial of this placed him on the side of the left Hegelians. However, once the designations of 'left' and 'right' came to be applied on the basis of whether one believed that Hegel's philosophy could be squared with Christianity, things become more complex. While Strauss wanted to deny the unique divinity of Christ by denying the supernatural, he did not intend to question Christianity *per se* and indeed believed he was contributing to a better comprehension of it, which would help to overcome the alienation caused by misunderstanding. Thus, while his original distinction may have made sense in its specific context, the manner in which his terminology came to be employed blurred and distorted the issues.

The labels used to characterize this period have obscured the actual content of the debates that took place and contributed to the misconception that they dealt with little other than Hegel's own orthodoxy or lack thereof. However, this view blinds one to the fact that these discussions touch on fundamental issues about philosophy and religion which have continued uninterrupted to our own day. Since the distinction of right and left Hegelian has long since ceased to be used to describe the discussions taking place in these fields, the mistaken impression can arise that what is at issue are entirely new and different discussions and that some radical break has taken place. However, the discussions about key Christian dogmas that followed in the wake of Hegel's philosophy anticipate many of the central issues of subsequent Christian thinking. The Hegelian debates from the 1830s and 1840s thus served as a crucible for a variety of issues that remain relevant for philosophical theology.

To cite just the best-known examples: (1) the work of Strauss and others from this period was the forerunner of numerous later attempts at demythologizing Christianity, including those of Bultmann and Gogarten. One can also mention Strauss' importance as the founder of the field of modern critical Bible studies and his immeasurable influence on the studies on the life of Christ that followed in the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century: Renan, Harnack, Loisy, Wrede, Schweitzer, et al. (2) Hegel himself was the forerunner of later attempts at a historical or cultural understanding of Christianity in the works of, for example, Dilthey, Nietzsche, and Troeltsch. (3) Feuerbach and Marx can be regarded as founders of the now flourishing fields of psychology and sociology of religion. (4) The field of hermeneutics was also born during this period. (5) Less well known but no less interesting is the constellation of problems surrounding relativism, historicism, subjectivism, nihilism, and alienation. These are issues that are traditionally associated with the twentieth century and existentialism, but a closer look reveals that all of these topics were already being debated in the 1830s and 1840s in the context of the disputes over the heritage of Hegel's philosophy. Thus to understand theology in the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries, one must have a fundamental grasp of the arguments surrounding Hegel's philosophy of religion.

8.6 Hegel as a Supporter or Critic of Religion and Christianity

The cause of the main overarching split between the right and left Hegelians was the question of whether Hegel was a supporter of orthodox Christianity. Whereas the right Hegelians tried to see Hegel as supporting orthodoxy, the left Hegelians saw him as undermining any form of traditional religious belief. While there are a number of passages in Hegel's lectures that seem strangely ambiguous on this score, there can be no doubt that his general goal was to rescue Christianity from the ravages of the Enlightenment and the subjectivism of the post-Enlightenment period. Indeed, as has been explored above, this is what he says directly and explicitly in the Introduction to his lectures, where he polemicizes against these modern forms of religious thinking. Moreover, the entire structure of his lectures points to Christianity as the one religion that is ultimately true. All of the other religions of the world develop in their conceptions of the divine until the true conception is reached in Christianity. It is the end or *telos* of the long story that Hegel wants to tell about the development of the different religions. Christianity is the one religion the divinity of which corresponds to the concept of God as spirit and thus completes the triad of the Concept as the particular that corresponds to the universal. Moreover, Christianity is the one religion with which human freedom is ultimately achieved by bringing to consciousness the divine in every human being. Given all of this, Hegel's explicit statements about the matter leave little room for ambiguity about his conscious goal with the lectures: to demonstrate the philosophical truth of Christianity and to restore the truth of the Christian dogmas which had been under attack ever since the Enlightenment.

Despite Hegel's explicit statements, suspicion still lingers. As noted in the Introduction to the present study, it has been claimed that Hegel was not authentic about his goals with the lectures since he feared the consequences of presenting a more critical approach in the current social-political climate in the conservative Prussian capital.¹²⁴ Or it might be argued that what he ended up with was something that unintentionally differed from his originally stated objectives. Specifically, it might be claimed that his general approach to religion as a historically developing phenomenon undermines the truth of any religion, especially given his understanding of the divine as a reflection of the self-image of a people. This view sounds suspiciously close to Feuerbach's theory that the gods are a projection and reification of thoughts produced by the human mind. This would

¹²⁴ See Introduction, Section 0.4.

seem to undermine the view that the God of Christianity has any ultimate ontological status.

This tension appears clearly in an instructive passage from Hegel's treatment of Greek polytheism. Here he takes up a very central question regarding his philosophy of religion generally. His idealism commits him to claiming that the different conceptions of the divine in the different world religions are all 'for consciousness' or are representations of the human mind. He explains, 'This is the appearing of the divine powers that occurs for "another," i.e., for subjective self-consciousness, and is known and shaped within the latter's own comprehension.'¹²⁵ Hegel says explicitly, 'But the organ by which self-consciousness grasps this subsisting thing, this substantial and essential [being] is fantasy, which images what is initially abstract, the inwardly or outwardly subsisting [essence], and produces it as what is first deemed to be a god.'¹²⁶ Here he seems to say explicitly that the nature of the gods is a product of the human mind. However, this seems to relegate the gods to some mere fantasy of the human imagination. This conclusion is in line with the left Hegelian view.

But this objection misunderstands Hegel's idealist view. According to his phenomenological understanding,¹²⁷ there is the conception of the divine, which is a thought (the divine in itself), and there are manifestations or revelations of the divine which are perceptions (the divine for another). But, as the phenomenological method makes clear, both of these elements are 'for consciousness' and thus can be compared. Indeed, there is nothing that is ultimately transcendent. This holds true not just of the gods but of everything. So the truth of the divine is not undermined by the fact that the gods are 'for us' in the sense that they are revealed in different ways that the human mind must perceive and interpret.

Hegel continues to refute the apparent consequence that this means that the gods only exist in the minds of the human beings who think them. Again in connection with the Greek gods, he explains:

[The gods] are discovered by the human spirit, not as they are in their implicitly and explicitly rational content, but in such a way that they are *gods*. They are made or poetically created, but they are not fictitious. To be sure, they emerge from human fantasy in contrast with what is already at hand, but they emerge as essential shapes, and the product is at the same time known as what is essential.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 655, note 401; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 547n.

¹²⁶ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 656; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 548.

¹²⁷ See Jon Stewart, 'Hegel's Philosophy of Religion as a Phenomenology,' *Filozofia*, vol. 75, no. 5, 2020, pp. 386–400.

¹²⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 2, p. 658, note 409; *VPR*, Part 2, p. 549n.

Hegel's point here is that the objection reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of idealism. An idea can mean different things. When one says that something is *only an idea*, then the implication is that the idea is something of lesser value or truth, that it pales in comparison to reality. But there is another side to this that says just the opposite, namely, that ideas are what is most real. When we talk about the truth of mathematics or geometry, we are talking about ideas. These are not physical things that we see in the world, but rather ideas produced by the human mind. But this does not undermine their truth. No one doubts the truth of the Pythagorean theorem or the addition or subtraction tables, even though they are ideas. Similarly individuals and nations go to war in the name of democracy and freedom, but once again these are not material objects but rather ideas. The fact that they are ideas does not undermine their value and truth. The point of Hegel's analyses of the world religions is to see the truth of their ideas as they developed in their own historical context. So while the Greeks created their gods from their own conceptions, this does not mean that they were arbitrary. Indeed, Hegel's goal is to show that they are a necessary reflection of the Greek view of the world at that time.

The Relevance of Hegel's Philosophy of Religion Today

Together with thinkers such as Kant, Kierkegaard, and Feuerbach, Hegel is one of the towering figures in the philosophy of religion of the first half of the nineteenth century. Ever since the posthumous publication of his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* in 1832,¹ his approach has been both appreciated and reviled. The cultural landscape concerning religion has changed considerably since Hegel's time. Today we live in multicultural societies and are in regular contact with people from other religious traditions. Moreover, due to the rise of secularism, religion no longer plays the dominant role that it once did. This then raises the question of whether Hegel's concerns with regard to the issues about religion in the nineteenth century are in any way still relevant for us today in the twenty-first century. Does Hegel have anything meaningful to say about the philosophy of religion in a pluralistic world? Or can he be safely dismissed so we can move on to more recent figures who have a better understanding of religion in our pluralistic twenty-first century?

I wish to argue that Hegel's views on the world religions and his defence of Christianity represent an important challenge with great relevance today. Moreover, as we have seen, his ideas on religion were developed in reaction to and in critical dialogue with two main traditions: the Enlightenment and Romanticism. It is easy to recognize in contemporary culture important strains from these traditions of thought. So by identifying the modern versions of these movements, we can begin to see the relevance of Hegel's views for discussions about religion in our own day.

9.1 The Heirs of the Enlightenment Today

From the Enlightenment's criticism of religion comes the view, still widespread today, that science has undermined and rendered implausible all traditional

¹ Hegel's *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, I–II, ed. by Philipp Marheineke, vols 11–12 (1832), in *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Werke. Vollständige Ausgabe*, vols 1–18, ed. by Ludwig Boumann, Friedrich Förster, Eduard Gans, Karl Hegel, Leopold von Henning, Heinrich Gustav Hotho, Philipp Marheineke, Karl Ludwig Michelet, Karl Rosenkranz, and Johannes Schulze, Berlin: Verlag von Duncker und Humblot 1832–45.

religious beliefs, and therefore anyone who persists in such beliefs is fundamentally irrational. These discussions also include the well-known debates about evolution and creationism. This view of the irrationality of religious belief is the cornerstone in the movement known as 'new atheism', which is associated with figures such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. These thinkers can be seen as modern incarnations of Enlightenment thinking since they assume a hostile and aggressive posture towards almost any form of religion. Although they cannot all be uniformly lumped together, there is a general tendency in their views to regard traditional religion as not merely a set of false beliefs but also a nefarious social and historical force. Their social activism on the issue is very much reminiscent of the zeal of their Enlightenment predecessors. Sam Harris' book from 2004, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, associates the rise of modern terrorism with a renewal of religious belief, specifically Islam.² In 2006 the biologist Richard Dawkins published *The God Delusion*, which portrayed religious belief as anachronistic and dangerous in the modern world.³ The great popularity of these books and others like them, notwithstanding the criticism that they have evoked, demonstrates that the views they present are widely shared and find a resonance in modern thinking.

In regard to the defenders of modern atheism and Enlightenment thinking, Hegel is, of course, positively disposed to a critical assessment of religious views and practices. Indeed, his lectures are full of critical evaluations of different conceptions of the divine. In this sense he shares an important intuition with the new atheists. Moreover, Hegel does not shy away from criticizing certain religious practices that he regards as inimical to the development of human freedom, and here he can be seen as making common cause with some of the defenders of new atheism. His critical views of, for example, ancient Chinese superstition or the Hindu practice of sati (or widow burning) are very much in line with the spirit of modern secular views. Like the followers of the new atheism, he is quick to condemn any practice or institution that he feels undermines the value, integrity, and freedom of the individual.

Hegel would, however, argue that the Enlightenment-inspired views of modern atheism and secularism are one-sided. As we have seen in this study, he attempts to demonstrate that there is a hidden reason or *logos* not just in Christianity but also in all religions. Religious belief and practice are a product of the human mind. As such, there is a rational basis for it, even if that is not immediately recognizable. He thus enjoins us to take a more cautious stance before dismissing religion as irrational belief or sheer nonsense. In this way he can help us to a much more nuanced understanding of religion than that afforded by new atheism. The haste

² Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*, New York and London: W. W. Norton 2004.

³ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, London: Bantam 2006.

and zeal with which modern atheists dismiss everything having to do with religion prevents them from understanding the phenomena that they are dismissing, and, on Hegel's view, this disposition would represent a highly unphilosophical approach.

One can see this contradiction in the way in which the followers of new atheism wish, on the one hand, to get rid of religion as absurd and irrational, but then, on the other hand, to see it as a part of an evolution of beliefs in history. In other words, if religion is a phenomenon that develops through history (as Hegel also believes that it does), then it must serve some function, or else it would not exist at all. According to the very premises of the defenders of this view, they are obliged to assume that religion must perform some such positive function to explain its viability from an evolutionary standpoint. But this is not in harmony with their zealous desire to dismiss religion wholesale as if it had no redeeming elements whatsoever. Here Hegel can help to show that there is something rational in religion that needs to be investigated and understood.

But before criticisms of religion can be issued, it is important that one reach a genuine knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices in question, and here Hegel is far more subtle and nuanced than the critical views espoused today. He has made a detailed study of the world religions based on the most up-to-date scholarly material that he could find. He has a deep understanding not just of the historical contexts of the different religions but also their role in connection with other elements of human culture such as art, philosophy, and politics. One does not have to follow Hegel on every point, but if one wishes to understand religion in a more profound way, then something like what he is proposing with a conceptual understanding of religion can be highly useful and instructive.

9.2 The Heirs of Romanticism Today

The Romantic view that religion is ultimately something subjective and personal that does not lend itself to discursive explanation or proof is still very much alive and well today. Many people with religious intuitions choose to avoid entering into arguments with the advocates of new atheism by taking this position. If religious belief is ultimately something inward and irreducibly personal, then one is excused from participating in any debate about the issue. This leads to what one might refer to as a form of transreligious spirituality, which is nondoctrinal. Somewhat oddly, even some of the advocates of atheism or agnosticism such as Neil deGrasse Tyson try to maintain a form of personal spirituality while rejecting traditional religion and theism. This is an intuition that can be traced back to Romanticism.

Akin to this is also a modern sentiment that is close to mysticism, that is, the belief that one feels a kind of unity with the divine in terms of a unity with the

universe as a whole. Some people see themselves as participating in nature and being continuous with it. They refer to the whole sometimes as God, but it can also take the form of what has been termed a godless mysticism, with reference merely to nature or the universe in general. In any case this is thought to capture a religious belief.

Although admittedly some of the German Romantics, such as Friedrich von Schlegel, were attracted to Catholicism, one strain of the Romantic view was a feeling of alienation from accepted religious forms. The Romantics sought instead a *new* kind of religiosity in the religion of ancient India.⁴ According to this view, only the recovery of such a past religion can serve as a viable alternative to the corrupt, decadent, and oppressive modern forms of religiosity in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This strain of Romanticism continues today in the form of the so-called esoteric religions. Esotericism represents a series of different movements that have continued to grow since the nineteenth century. These movements evidence a longing for forms of religion that are different from the mainstream.

As we have seen, Hegel appreciates the focus on the individual and subjectivity that arose with Romanticism. This has proven to be an important step in breaking down the tyranny of custom and habit that undermined subjective freedom for so long. With Romanticism the importance of the individual has risen dramatically. The idea of universal human rights as outlined in the charter of the United Nations can be seen as one result of this modern understanding of the absolute, irreducible value of the human being, and Hegel would doubtless welcome this development.

However, Hegel's critical stance towards the Romantic intuition concerns its lack of concrete content. Many people today would prefer to remain in the sphere of subjectivity and inwardness and would have little patience for Hegel's attempt to defend the traditional dogmas of Christianity such as the Incarnation, the Revelation, the Trinity, etc. As has been seen above, Hegel has clearly demonstrated the problematic nature of this position. Indeed, his analysis of Christianity

⁴ See A. Leslie Willson, *A Mythical Image: The Ideal of India in German Romanticism*, Durham: Duke University Press 1964. John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987. Suzanne L. Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010. Michael S. Dodson, *Orientalism, Empire and National Culture: India, 1770–1880*, Houndmills and New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2007. Douglas T. McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism: Ancient India's Rebirth in Modern Germany*, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 2009. Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880*, trans. by Gene Patterson-Black and Victor Reinking, New York: Columbia University Press 1984. Todd Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press 2004. *Der Deutschen Morgenland. Bilder des Orients in der deutschen Literatur und Kultur von 1770 bis 1850*, ed. by Charis Goer and Michael Hofmann, Munich: Wilhelm Fink 2008. Nicholas A. Germana, *The Orient of Europe: The Mythical Image of India and Competing Images of German National Identity*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2009.

and the world religions has shown the importance of concrete content in religious belief. Some kind of objective dogma or belief is imperative for any religion. Without such content, any form of religion collapses into arbitrariness. His critical voice here can be useful in evaluating the manifold modern forms of spirituality that continually escape to the inwardness of the individual instead of providing specific doctrines of belief.

9.3 Hegel and Religious Pluralism

Writing at the time of a great wave of interest in non-European cultures in the first half of the nineteenth century, Hegel was among the first to realize the reality of religious pluralism. He saw that a philosophy of religion that wanted to favour Christianity must at a minimum have some story to tell about the other religions of the world. Thus there might be some justification in seeing him as a pluralistic thinker, but there are many good reasons to proceed with caution since Hegel has also been criticized as a supporter of a pro-European colonial agenda, which would of course undermine any meaningful respect for pluralism. We need to acknowledge these criticisms and take them seriously. However, we also need to recognize that Hegel's thought is not a simple, one-dimensional matter. It developed over time and has many nuances and angles that can be emphasized. Depending on which aspect one chooses to focus on, a different picture emerges. Indeed, it is not wrong to talk about many different Hegels in this sense.⁵ While I do not want to dismiss or play down the criticisms, I wish to draw attention to a side of Hegel that indeed looks rather progressive and that welcomes religious pluralism.

Initially this idea might seem to be a task destined to failure at the outset, first, since Hegel has frequently been criticized as a straightforward reactionary apologist for Christianity and specifically Protestantism. These criticisms are understandable when one sees that Hegel himself states rather clearly that his goal is to vindicate the truth of Christianity by restoring its key doctrines, which, he believes, in his time have been largely abandoned, even by those who claim to be defenders of the faith. Much of what he says can be accepted by Catholicism, but there can be no doubt that his real aim is to justify the Protestant faith. Hegel was a devoted follower of Luther, which he declares openly. He was critical of Catholicism, which he believed undermined the freedom of the individual. His

⁵ I refer here to the article of my late friend David Kangas: 'Which Hegel? Reconsidering Hegel and Kierkegaard,' in *Papers of the Nineteenth Century Theology Group: Papers Presented in the Nineteenth Century Theology Group at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion Conference*, ed. by Andrew J. Burgess, David D. Schultenover, Daniel W. Hardy and Theodore Vial, Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers 2004 (*Papers of the Nineteenth Century Theology Group*, vol. 35), pp. 15–34.

account of the philosophy of religion can thus be seen as one in a long string of apologetic accounts that are intended to justify the rise of Protestantism.⁶

Second, Hegel's teleology or evolutionary theory seems to undermine a genuinely pluralistic approach. As is well known, in his account in the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel argues that one historical people replaces the next in the development of history. What he calls 'spirit' moves successively from China to India, Persia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome and then culminates in what he refers to as the Germanic world, that is, roughly, Prussia, the German states, and Northern Europe. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, he follows this same general scheme and attempts to apply it to his understanding of the history of the religions of the world.⁷ Thus, the different religions represent the different peoples of the world and succeed one another in a similar way. Hegel arranges the religions of the world in a more or less rigid ascending teleological order that culminates in Christianity.⁸ He carefully traces the changes in the different conceptions of the divine as they appear in the different world religions. This would seem to imply that the other religions of the world are simply flawed or inadequate and for this reason are passé or, to use his language, *aufgehoben*. The approach seems to imply a dismissive stance towards all of the different world religions with the exception of Christianity and thus would seem to undermine religious tolerance and an appreciation for religious pluralism.

Even more damaging than this is the fact that the reader does not have to look too hard to find certain racist or ethnocentric elements in Hegel's accounts of the non-European religions. Judged by our modern standards and sensibilities, his language is offensive when he describes, for example, Hindus or followers of the ancient Chinese state religion who venerate the divinity Tian. This has recently evoked a wealth of secondary literature, which rightly condemns this element in Hegel's thought.⁹ Racial prejudices of this kind would also clearly seem to

⁶ See Chapter 6, Section 6.8 above.

⁷ This creates a number of problems for him that we cannot enter into here in any detail. For example, Buddhism is not a national religion and thus cannot be geographically pinpointed to a specific people. Moreover, some ancient religions, such as Judaism, are still alive and well today and thus seem to have resisted the force of history to capitulate. It has of course also been noted that there are serious flaws in the very notion of world religions. In Hegel's time complex religious practices and belief systems were categorized under a single general name, but the reality of the phenomena is in fact considerably more complicated.

⁸ It should be noted that in his lectures he did occasionally change the order of the sequence of the religions from one year to the next.

⁹ See, for example, Teshale Tibebu, *Hegel and the Third World: The Making of Eurocentrism in World History*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press 2011. Robert Bernasconi, 'Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti,' in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. by Stuart Barnett, New York: Routledge 1998, pp. 41–63. Robert Bernasconi, 'With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Eurocentrism,' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, vol. 22, 2000, pp. 171–201. Robert Bernasconi, 'The Return of Africa: Hegel and the Question of the Racial Identity of the Egyptians,' in *Identity and Difference: Studies in Hegel's Logic, Philosophy of Spirit and Politics*, ed. by Philip Grier, Albany, State University of New York Press 2007, pp. 201–16. Babacar Camara, 'The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa,' *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2005, pp. 82–96. Michael H. Hoffheimer, 'Hegel, Race,

undermine a sober and objective assessment of the world religions. Thus once again Hegel does not seem to be a good candidate for a spokesman for religious pluralism.

9.4 Evidence for a More Tolerant, Pluralistic Hegel

I readily acknowledge these criticisms and think that they should indeed be taken very seriously. There is, however, other evidence that suggests that Hegel is more open to religious pluralism than we might initially think. First, it will be noted that Hegel's account of the determinate religions, that is, the religions of the world prior to Christianity, is a profoundly rich and well-researched part of his lectures.¹⁰ Contemporary observers noted how seriously Hegel took the non-European religions and how he was at great pains to read everything he could about the new research being done in the different fields of what we would today call Asian studies. Rosenkranz writes that Hegel developed 'an interest for the study of the Orient', and he 'cast himself into the study of oriental cultures with genuine enthusiasm and his usual persistence'.¹¹ Moreover, Hegel seemed to have had a particular interest for ancient China. Eduard Gans, the first editor of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, states that Hegel spent an excessive amount of time with this material. Gans uses this as a justification for cutting out a large portion of this in his edition of the work.¹² Whatever the editorial issues involved were, this is clear testimony that Hegel was at pains to learn as much as he could about ancient Chinese history and religion and was not merely doing so in a *pro forma* manner so that he could hasten on to his account of Christianity.

Second, when we compare Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* with then contemporary works in the field, we can see a striking difference. The philosophies of religion of Kant and Fichte are dedicated more or less exclusively

Genocide,' *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 39 (supplement), 2001, pp. 35–62. Michael H. Hoffheimer, 'Race and Law in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion,' in *Race and Racism in Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Andrew Valls, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2005, pp. 194–216.

¹⁰ See my recent *Hegel's Interpretation of the Religions of the World: The Logic of the Gods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018.

¹¹ Karl Rosenkranz, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's Leben*, Berlin: Duncker und Humblot 1844, p. 378.

¹² Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, ed. by Eduard Gans, vol. 9 [1837], in *Hegel's Werke*, p. XVII: 'In the first delivery of his lectures on the philosophy of history, Hegel devoted a full third of his time to the Introduction and to China—a part of the work which was elaborated with wearisome prolixity. Although in subsequent deliveries he was less circumstantial in regard to this Empire, the editor was obliged to reduce the description to such proportions as would prevent the Chinese section from encroaching upon, and consequently prejudicing the treatment of, the other parts of the work.' See the useful reprint of Sibree's translation of this Preface in Michael Hoffheimer, *Eduard Gans and the Hegelian Philosophy of Law*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers 1995, pp. 97–106; p. 104. See also Robert Bernasconi, 'With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Eurocentrism,' *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, vol. 22, 2000, p. 173. Note that the later editor Lasson attempted to restore this material: Hegel, *OW*, pp. 275–342.

to an understanding of Christianity. No historical account of the world religions is given. Neither Kant nor Fichte feels any particular need to make a study of another religion and certainly not a non-European one. It is only with Hegel that the enormous amount of then new material about Asian culture and religion is first introduced into the field at all. In this sense, Hegel, for better or worse, has clearly played a central role in the introduction of the very idea of world religions.¹³ This would seem to imply that he is in fact keenly aware of the importance of pluralism in his own day. This makes sense given that this was a time when Europe was beginning to discover a number of new cultures in Africa and Asia. One can then say in this regard that he recognized the need to take seriously other religions and to try to understand their history and belief systems.

Third, this more tolerant and pluralistic Hegel seems to be confirmed by what he actually says to his students at the outset of the lectures themselves. He is attentive to the fact that some of the material that he will be presenting will strike them as odd or even offensive. So he cautions his auditors as follows: 'A survey of these religions reveals what supremely marvelous and bizarre flights of fancy the nations have hit upon in their representations of the divine essence... To cast aside these religious representations and usages as superstition, error, and fraud is to take a superficial view of the matter.'¹⁴ He explains along the same lines: 'The higher need is to apprehend what it means, its positive and true [significance], its connection with what is true—in short, its *rationality*. After all it is human beings who have lighted upon such religions, so there must be reason in them—in everything contingent there must be a higher necessity.'¹⁵ From this it is clear that he sees something true in the different world religions, and that he encourages his students to set aside their prejudices so that they can see it as well. This reveals a perhaps surprising side of Hegel since he appears to advocate a serious study of non-European religions and to confront polemically dismissive views that ridicule them as superstition.

In the so-called 'Tübingen Essay', written long before his Berlin lectures, he also criticizes religious intolerance along the same lines:

Whoever finds that other peoples' modes of representation—heathens, as they are called—contain so much absurdity that they cause him to delight in his own higher insights, his understanding, which convinces him that he sees further than the greatest of men saw, does not comprehend the essence of religion. Someone

¹³ Of course, the concept of world religions is today a controversial topic. See, for example, David Chidester, 'World Religions in the World,' *Journal for the Study of Religion*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2018, pp. 41–53. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2005.

¹⁴ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 198; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 107. See also Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, pp. 310–11; *Jub.*, vol. 12, p. 417.

¹⁵ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 198; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 107.

who calls Jehovah Jupiter or Brahma and is truly pious offers his gratitude or his sacrifice in just as childlike a manner as does the true Christian.¹⁶

This passage is particularly striking with its comparison to Christianity. It is not so surprising that he refers to the Roman god Jupiter, but that he also defends the Hindu Brahma bespeaks an openness to non-Western cultures. Here he strikes a considerably more modern and pluralistic tone than one might think. He seems to suggest that there is a general instinct or disposition that unites all religious people across sectarian boundaries, and that this instinct should be the object of respect.

9.5 The Question of Truth at Earlier Stages of Religious Development

The key question that Hegel's economy of the world religions raises is what precisely the status is of the different religions that lead up to Christianity. As noted, at first glance, his teleology and hierarchy would seem immediately to undercut a respectful evaluation of these other religions. If Christianity alone is true, then all other religions must be *ipso facto* false. However, I want to ask if this is necessarily true.

As is well known, Hegel often uses images of plants and organic life as analogies in order to illustrate the development of conceptual thinking.¹⁷ The seed, the root, the stem, the leaf, the bud, and the flower all belong to the same plant, although they are each very different from one another. Each of them plays its own crucial role in the development of the plant, which could not exist without all of them. The plant as a complex organic entity consists of several elements which must all be realized in the correct temporal sequence. It would be wrong to say that the truth, so to speak, is found only in one of these since all of them have an equal claim to be a necessary part of the plant as a whole. Hegel extends this analogy to the development of the world religions.¹⁸ They all form a part of a larger developing concept.

If we take seriously analogies of this kind, this would seem to imply that Hegel's teleology is not so dismissive towards the non-Christian religions as one might at

¹⁶ Hegel, *TE*, p. 38; *TJ*, p. 10.

¹⁷ See, for example, Hegel, *PhS*, p. 2; *Jub.*, vol. 2, p. 12: 'The bud disappears in the bursting-forth of the blossom, and one might say that the former is refuted by the latter; similarly, when the fruit appears, the blossom is shown in its turn as a false manifestation of the plant, and the fruit now emerges as the truth of it instead. These forms are not just distinguished from one another, they also supplant one another as mutually incompatible. Yet at the same time their fluid nature makes them moments of an organic unity in which they not only do not conflict, but in which each is as necessary as the other; and this mutual necessity alone constitutes the life of the whole.'

¹⁸ Hegel, *LPR*, vol. 1, p. 182; *VPR*, Part 1, p. 90.

first glance assume. On this view, each of the different religions prior to Christianity has a legitimate and important role to play. Each of them captures a specific truth representative of its time and culture. This is not a far-fetched interpretation. Indeed, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset presented precisely this view in the context of Hegel's philosophy of history. He writes:

Hegel's historical philosophy has the ambition of justifying each epoch, each human stage, and avoiding the error of vulgar progressivism that considers all that is past as essential barbarity...Hegel wants to demonstrate...that what is historical is an emanation of reason; that the past has good sense; or...that universal history is not a string of foolish acts. Rather Hegel wants to demonstrate that in the gigantic sequence of history something serious has happened, something that has reality, structure and reason. And to this end he tries to show that all periods have had reason, precisely because they were different and even contradictory.¹⁹

This interpretation is clearly correct. For Hegel, reason appears not just at the end of the development but at every step along the way as well, and the trick is to learn how to recognize it.

Hegel states straightforwardly that each stage of religious development possesses some truth. In the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, we read the following: 'However erroneous a religion may be, it possesses truth, although in a mutilated phase. In every religion there is a divine presence, a divine relation; and a philosophy of history has to seek out the spiritual element even in the most imperfect forms.'²⁰ This then raises the question about what exactly is this truth that is found in earlier stages of religious development and how is it different from the 'absolute' truth of Christianity. The idea seems to be that the human mind is fundamentally rational, and thus its products, in the multitude of forms found in human culture, also contain an element of this rationality. Although the different myths and stories of the gods and goddesses of the different religions might strike us as confusing and bizarre, there is buried in them some element of human reason that can be discerned if we can find it. These stories are a reflection of the mind of the people who created them.

We can find an echo of this at the beginning of Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. There Durkheim acknowledges, 'Religions are thought to differ in value and rank; it is generally said that some are truer than others. The highest forms of religious thought cannot, it seems, be compared to the lowest

¹⁹ See Luanne Buchanan and Michael H. Hoffheimer, 'Hegel and America by José Ortega y Gasset,' *Clio*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1995, p. 71.

²⁰ *Phil. of Hist.*, pp. 195–6; *Jub.*, vol. 11, p. 261.

without degrading the former to the level of the latter.'²¹ He explains his approach as follows:

It is a basic postulate of sociology that a human institution cannot rest on error and falsehood or it could not endure. If it were not based on the nature of things, it would have met with resistance from those very things and could not have prevailed. When we approach the study of primitive religions, then, it is with the certainty that they are rooted in reality and are an expression of it.²²

In conclusion to this methodological discussion, he writes: 'In reality, then, there are no false religions. All are true in their fashion: all respond, if in different ways, to the given conditions of human existence.'²³ In a sense this can be regarded as a restatement of Hegel's basic view.

9.6 Hegel and Comparative Theology

A part of our modern struggle with religious pluralism lies in the perceived tension between one's own religious beliefs and the presence of other religious beliefs and traditions. If I am a religious person, then of course I hold dearly the key doctrines of my religion. I take them to be absolute or foundationally true and even try to organize my life in accordance with them. This would seem to imply that I take all other beliefs to be false, especially those that contradict the teachings of my own religion. So there is a natural limit to the idea of religious tolerance, which can be found in one's own religious beliefs. I can, of course, say that other people have the right to exercise religious freedom: they are at their liberty to believe what they want and to practice their religion as they wish. But I cannot say that their beliefs are true in the same way that mine are since this would seem to undermine the absolute claim that every religion places on its believers. This dilemma is present in Hegel's philosophy of religion in the way that we have just discussed: namely, there is a tension between Christianity's claim to being the absolute truth, in contrast to the claim that the other religions are merely relative truths along the way leading up to it. So if we take away for the moment the question of Hegel's teleology, the issue is fundamentally the same.

Here by way of conclusion, I would like to suggest that this tension is based on a misperception, namely, that religious beliefs are necessarily mutually exclusive and to believe the one necessarily means that one must be intolerant towards

²¹ Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. by Carol Cosman, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001, pp. 3–4.

²² Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 4.

²³ Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 4.

others. I take as my model the approach which Frank Clooney and others have designated 'Comparative Theology'.²⁴ This is a movement that seeks interreligious understanding by taking seriously the claims of all religious traditions and learning from others while not dismissing one's own faith. The guiding premise of Comparative Theology is that religion is a fundamental aspect of the human experience, which arises from a common human need. Therefore, it makes sense to try to find points of overlap in the beliefs and practices of different faiths. Whatever the premise, common sense seems to dictate that one try to learn from the other in any case. According to this view, there is something universal in religion as such, and thus religious truth can be found in different traditions and indeed wherever humans think, act, feel, and love. (It will be noted that this is very much in line with Hegel's approach.) So this means that one can find, for example, Christian truths in Hindu or Buddhist texts and vice versa. I submit that the idea of Comparative Theology is a more satisfying way to treat religious pluralism than Hegel's teleology, but it is not necessarily incompatible with it. In fact, in the two approaches one can find both of the key elements that we mentioned above: a sense of one truth found in one's own religious tradition and that of other truths found in others.

Hegel's historical approach starts to look not so crazy if we consider that in many cases religions seem *de facto* to have overlapped and borrowed ideas from one another. It has long been suggested, for example, that Judaism had its origin in the ancient Egyptian religion. Scholars have also noted the relations between Hinduism and Zoroastrianism. The historical connections between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are well documented. What do these historical connections tell us? Religious ideas rarely die out. They get appropriated and co-opted in different contexts where they are further developed in different ways. These kinds of connections might, however, offer a possibility of religious dialogue and respect.

When we examine two different things, this always takes place under the aegis of the categories of identity and difference. The two things are similar to one another in certain respects, and they are different from one another in other respects. In the history of religion, it is the differences which are often underscored, and this has led to a long history of religious wars, persecutions, and violence. However, the historical connections between the different world religions also provide a basis for a positive comparison of points of similarity.

I believe that Hegel's approach is in many ways consistent with the view of Comparative Theology, and indeed that this can afford us a fresh look at his philosophy of religion. Both Hegel and Comparative Theology teach us that an interest in and respect for the history of religion or other religions do not need to undermine or compromise one's personal belief in one's own religion. Thus the

²⁴ Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*, Malden, MA, Oxford, and Chichester: Wiley Blackwell 2010.

perceived tension between the absolute claims of one's own religion and that of other religions is not as problematic as it might seem.

The tension that we note with regard to religious tolerance and pluralism is just one aspect of a much more fundamental phenomenon that concerns our basic relation to the world. Every person has certain beliefs—some held more dearly than others. In our interaction with the world, we are constantly comparing our beliefs with the feedback or pushback that the world gives us. We constantly have experiences that contradict our beliefs and cause us to rethink them and modify them. This is what it means to live in the world as a sentient and thinking being. Religious beliefs are just one example of this. They form a part of our broader belief system that is constantly under evaluation. It does not make sense to reproach someone of intolerance simply because they believe something different from someone else and wish to insist on their own convictions. Indeed, this is the case all the time. The idea of religious intolerance must mean something different and much stronger than this. Thus, there is nothing intolerant in believing in a specific religion. This does not in itself undermine an interest in, an appreciation of, and a respect for other religions or belief systems. Thus, I submit, that the perceived tension between holding a fundamental or absolute belief and the pluralism of religions is not a real tension. It is a pseudoproblem. When the issue is seen from this perspective, a new picture of Hegel emerges, a Hegel who can help us today in our modern struggle against religious intolerance.

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